

The Education of Young Children

by the same author

★

THE CHILDREN'S PLAY CENTRE
TESTING RESULTS IN THE INFANT SCHOOL
LONG TERM RESULTS OF INFANT
SCHOOL METHODS

The Education of Young Children

by

D. E. M. GARDNER, M.A.

*Head of the Department of Child Development
University of London Institute of Education*

METHUEN AND CO LTD
36 ESSEX STREET • LONDON WC 2

First published in 1956

CHECKED

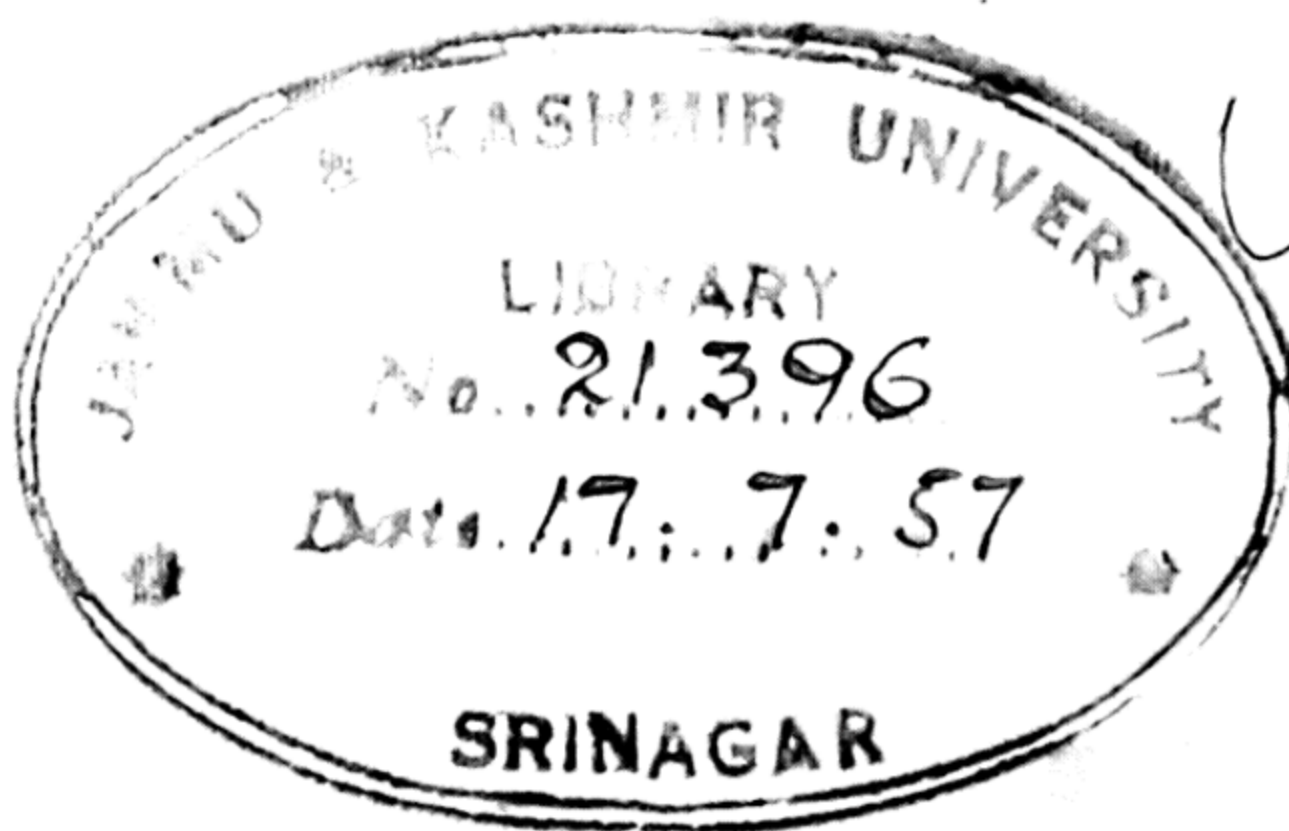
m

T 01

372.2

SA

G472 E



CATALOGUE NO. 5871/U

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS, ABERDEEN

Contents



Preface	<i>page</i> 7
Introduction	9
1. Young Children and their Feelings	13
2. Interest in other Children	24
3. Learning and Thinking	32
4. Play and Mental Health	61
5. Parents and their Children's Problems	68
6. Preparation for Nursery School Teaching	82
7. The Influence of the Nursery School upon the Infant School	90
8. The Future of Nursery Schools	95
Books Recommended	102
Appendix : The Need for Nursery Schools (by Joan E. Cass)	105

Preface



In the last two years I have been asked several times to give talks and participate in conferences for teachers of young children, with the special purpose of assessing again, in the light of our present knowledge, the chief psychological needs of young children and of considering the bearings of what we now know of these needs upon our practice in Nursery School education and upon the training of teachers for Nursery Schools. This book is written at the request of some of those who attended these conferences.

My contribution was concerned with the education of the children, with special emphasis on their psychological needs. Physical care is, of course, a fundamental part of education and it would be impossible to omit all reference to it, but I have not attempted to deal in any detail with matters which in these conferences were naturally entrusted to medical experts.

I should like to express my thanks to Miss A. L. Murton, H.M.I., of the Ministry of Education, for her encouragement to write this book and for so kindly reading the manuscript.

Among the many friends and colleagues, to whom I am indebted for interest and advice, I should specially like to mention Miss Dorothy May, of Fishponds Training College, for most careful editorial help and many useful suggestions, Miss Emily Grant (lately of the Ministry of Education) and my colleague, Miss Mary

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Haskell, who have also given me very helpful advice and encouragement.

None of these people is, of course, responsible for any of the opinions I have expressed.

D. E. M. GARDNER

Introduction



The Nursery School is a very dynamic part of education. Changing social influences and constant research into the nature and needs of young children, as well as development in our concepts of the nature and purpose of education itself, are all apt to exert influences more rapidly upon education in Nursery Schools than upon other parts of the educational system. The reasons for the sensitivity of Nursery School teachers to such influences are manifold. Nursery Schools, being more recent institutions than schools for older children, have fewer accumulated traditions and are free from any need to consider specific requirements imposed by examinations. Nursery School teachers, working as they so inevitably do in close relationship with parents, are liable to be very quickly aware of social conditions and their effect on home life and the physical and mental health of mothers and children. Doctors and psychologists, alike, frequently draw attention to the importance of the early years of childhood as affording the best opportunity of safeguarding the child from damage and laying down the foundations of sound and satisfactory development for later life. Moreover, the very dependence of young children upon us, and the rapidity with which they respond to understanding care, makes it difficult for anyone concerned with their welfare to feel apathetic or indifferent. More battles are probably fought over questions of Nursery School procedure than in any other part of the educational world! While too much conflict of opinion can

be distracting to teachers, at least they have the satisfaction of knowing that their work is regarded as important and they are not likely to stagnate.

Young children also attract the attention of research workers and our knowledge is therefore constantly increasing. The Nursery School, where the children are allowed a considerable measure of freedom, is a very fruitful laboratory for the observation of spontaneous behaviour. Those who are concerned with the education of young children are therefore constantly challenged by the need to review their procedure in the light of fresh knowledge now available, about the nature and needs of the children and their ways of learning, thinking and feeling. Development in our knowledge of the physical needs of children has also taken place with great rapidity since the early days of Nursery School education.

It is reassuring to find that the more we learn, the more we are aware that problems which were once caused by apparent conflicts between what was good for the child physically and what was most helpful psychologically, are steadily being solved.

Physical, emotional and social needs are fundamental and predominant, but the intellectual needs are vital too. The child is, of course, a whole person; we do not see him acting from purely intellectual motives and it is seldom that his feelings completely over-ride his intellectual interests, though this sometimes happens. There is great interplay between the two and also between physical and psychological factors.

We have at least learned that it is no use trying to educate a hungry or sleepy child or one who is suffering from physical discomfort or pain.

I think we have learnt, too, that we cannot educate a very unhappy child, or one who is, even temporarily, in

the throes of jealousy or anger or mourning. We are also coming more and more to realise that emotional satisfactions lie at the root of all intellectual interests and that feelings are the driving force behind all intellectual effort. In dealing with the youngest children we do not, however, always take sufficient account of the fact that intellectual satisfactions are essential if full happiness is to be attained. Even the young baby, if left without objects to explore with his senses or space for his muscular experiments, becomes unhappy and fretful, and even young children will often overcome feelings of distress or disappointment when given something to do which arouses their interest and gives them scope for thought and learning.

During the war years, when more advanced constructional toys were scarce and children under five had often to be in charge of staff with little or no training, it was often remarked that the four-year-old children in Nurseries were 'naughty'. There is little doubt that their noisy and aggressive behaviour was often due to lack of intellectual stimulus and satisfaction, since their response was so marked when more interesting material became available and the staff learned to give them companionship in their play and to follow up their interests and help them to achieve more knowledge and skill.

The 'wholeness' of the child is also illustrated by the way in which, once children are given freedom in their play, they frequently use for wider purposes apparatus and toys which were originally designed to promote one particular aspect of development. It is commonly found, for example, that the climbing frames designed for promoting muscular development are also used for social play, and toys designed to encourage perception of form or colour or length are used by the child to further his imaginative purposes.

In the early days of Nursery School education, we used to try to persuade a child to use material only in the way for which it was intended. By close observation of him we are learning that the intended value of the material is not lost, but often furthered, if we do not try to confine its use to the orthodox, but allow him to find other values also. A child who wants to build an aeroplane with bricks varying in length, instead of merely arranging them in order of length, is not likely to pay *less* attention to discrimination of length because he wants the longest brick for the body of his aeroplane and the wings and propeller to be of appropriate length. Moreover, besides expressing and perhaps sharpening his visual perception, he is achieving a higher end—creating out of relatively stereotyped and unpromising material the concrete embodiment of the vision in his own mind. In other words, he is being creative. There are, moreover, times when the child's need to externalise, express and share his phantasies is so imperious and urgent that to prevent it would impair the release of his intellectual capacity.

I

Young Children and their Feelings



Nursery School teachers are learning to respect the reality and intensity of the child's feelings and to realise something of their complexity. We have progressed a long way in this direction. There was a time when teachers looked upon such matters as eating, sleeping and toilet training purely as means of satisfying physical needs. They exalted the concept of habit, often at the expense of the child's feelings. They were often taught that there was only one best or right way for all children to behave if their physical welfare was to be achieved and they therefore aimed at achieving uniform behaviour and remonstrated with parents if they pleaded that their children were not suited to the routine. How often, for example, the Nursery School teacher, patiently and authoritatively, told parents that they were mistaken in thinking that an afternoon sleep caused the child to be wakeful at bedtime or to wake very early in the morning, whereas we now know that the amount of sleep needed varies from child to child and that there are indeed certain children of whom what the parents were saying was true, although there are others who really need the afternoon sleep and who, after a little familiarity with the new surroundings, will settle easily to sleep and wake refreshed and vigorous. The children who did not really need the sleep either tossed restlessly on their beds and did not sleep at all, or, if out of boredom finally went

to sleep, often woke cross and heavy and then became exceedingly wide awake when the evening bedtime came. We have learnt to watch children as individuals and to provide a period of quiet play or occupation for children who do not need the afternoon sleep, so that they need no longer toss unhappily and unoccupied upon a bed—which was probably the most exhausting occupation of the day for such children!

We are realising too, that meal times and toilet training are far more than matters of physical importance. There is a wealth of feeling involved and it is in the situations of eating, washing, using the lavatory and going to bed that the child is often most aware of feelings connected with his parents and his home. An insistence that he should eat unwanted food, or conform suddenly to unfamiliar toilet routine, can make him profoundly unhappy. It is only when he is confident and happy in his new surroundings that he is ready to try new ways and he will then often co-operate spontaneously in what he sees other children do, or easily take up a suggestion that he should do so. Not until his feelings are at ease can these matters fall to the level of habit and, even then, an apparently well-established habit can break down under the stress of feeling or the urge to progress, as babies will discard crawling habits when they begin to walk and run, or revert to outgrown thumb-sucking or bed-wetting at moments of distress or loneliness.

The period of 2 to 3 years is one of great vividness and intensity of feeling. At no later period, not even at adolescence, are the feelings as intense and vivid, not so much because the feelings weaken as because, later on, there is more power of judgement which helps control of feeling. Memory, too, gradually gives a greater sense of proportion and there is therefore less anxiety. At first there is so little to temper feelings, no real conception of past and future;

grief, despair, loneliness, anger and fear all feel to the child as if they will last for ever and when possessed by one feeling the young child is not aware of other feelings which can temper the one which now possesses him. If he is angry with his teacher he may say, 'You're a devil', or 'I wish you were dead', and for the time being, that is how he feels, though a few minutes later he may with equal sincerity say, 'You are the nicest person in the world and I'll marry you when I grow up'.

The child's feelings are not, of course, all anxious ones. Children abandon themselves with equal whole-heartedness to transports of delight, joy and wonder. But those who know young children are always alert and prepared for rapid swings of feeling. Normal young children have long periods of calm cheerfulness and peaceful happy play, but in any group of them one or other may be seized at any moment by a sudden change of mood, especially if frustrated in his purpose or wishes by the interference of other children or by his own inability to achieve success.

Sensory feelings are very prominent. The young child needs at times a physical caress to assure him of love. A warm clasp of the hand sometimes brings comfort when words fail. A welcoming smile may make all the difference to his feelings on entering school in the morning.

In earlier days Nursery School teachers were sometimes trained to avoid expressions of spontaneous affection. They were warned not to gratify their own maternal impulses at the expense of the child and taught that the child longed for independence. There is, of course, much truth in this view and it is indeed a mistake to interrupt children by caresses at times when they are happily occupied, or to render services for them when they would like to be performing them for themselves or are ready to accept encouragement to do so, but there are other times when a

child needs to know that we are willing to help him, and one who may not have enough affection at home or is in a mood of depression or despair may be very much helped by the spontaneous expression of affection which is given by an adult who is sensitive to his needs. An older voluntary helper (herself a grandmother), in a war-time Nursery for evacuated children, said to me once, 'I don't know whether I really do much for them, but at least I'm cuddler-in-chief'. She devoted special attention to the unattractive and less happy children and there is no doubt that she fulfilled a very valuable function.

The child may show his anger and hostility in physical ways and, if very much aroused, will resort to kicking, biting and spitting. He may at times need physical restraint but this should never be violent or severe. The child welcomes a firm but protective and kindly restraint at times when his own feelings are beyond his control. He may be very angry at the time when he is firmly restrained, but he shows his relief afterwards in very clear ways and does not really trust a weak and anxious adult. His feelings are at times very complex. He has little ability to explain or reason about them, or to understand our reasoning.

By two years old the child has already travelled a long way in his emotional development and gives clear evidence that he can experience, in their simpler forms at least, the whole range of human emotions. The earliest figure around whom his most intense feelings cluster is his mother or a substitute for her—the person who feeds and gives most of the physical care to him. It is difficult to compensate a child to whom a good and loving relationship with one person has been denied in his infancy. Such children are best helped if someone can be found who will give, at a later stage, the warmth and personal care that a good mother

would provide. The Nursery School teacher may, in some cases, fill this rôle.

If the child has had full and satisfactory experience of the first great personal relationship of his life and has learnt to cope with the inevitable feelings of rage and fear which are also centred on the person he loves most, he will, by the time he enters Nursery School, have enlarged the circle of people who are important in his feelings. In a normal home the father will be of great importance and the child will also have learned to care for some special relatives or friends of the family and perhaps older brothers and sisters and, though it is probable at the age of two that the mother will still be the most important person to him, he shows as the year goes on that he is less completely dependent on her. He is not psychologically ready for a Nursery School until this stage has been reached. The actual age by which children are ready varies in different children and under different circumstances and home influences. There is no doubt that we need to watch the individual child closely, especially if he is below the age of three, and, if circumstances make it possible, be ready to advise mothers to wait a little longer if the child is not yet ready to settle down happily after a reasonable trial. The alternatives before some children may be even more difficult than an over-early entry to the Nursery School, but in such cases some adult will need to give a great deal of extra mothering and for the happiness and future welfare of the children it is to be hoped that such cases will not be too many for the staff of the Nursery School to be able to meet this need.

The newcomer to the Nursery School, whenever he comes, will almost certainly pass through a period, which may be quite short, in which he needs special protective care from an adult. He often selects the adult he needs and

his reasons for selection are interesting and varied. He often chooses the person to whom the mother has first consigned him and very often this will be the Superintendent. In any case, she is likely to be frequently selected, as the child seems to sense very quickly that she is invested with special authority and he often feels safer with her. He may, however, select the first adult who makes friendly advances to him, and I have often found that an adult who shows that she recognises his longing for his mother, and will take him to look for her and meet her with him when she comes for him, is selected as the most loved and trusted person. In other cases the reason is not so clear, but appears to rest on a mysterious affinity which exists between some adults and some children. It may be that some physical resemblance to a loved person plays a part or that some qualities of personality win a response. If it is possible to allow the adult to whom the child feels a particular attachment to support him for a time, the child will often settle into the Nursery School more easily and quickly than he otherwise would.

In many Nursery Schools now, wise methods of helping the new child to adjust to the very strange situation are being used. In some schools the mother is encouraged to remain, quietly employing herself in the Nursery School, until the child is so settled that he is willing for her to withdraw for gradually lengthening periods. In other schools the new child is allowed to enter for very short periods at first, or to get to know the Nursery School for a period before he actually enters. These procedures, which recognise the need for the child to make a gradual rather than a sudden adjustment, are very helpful and prevent much unnecessary suffering. The child is allowed to form personal attachments to new people before he is required to part with the person to whom he is most attached.

It is sometimes helpful to warn a young assistant that when a child has formed a real relationship with her it will involve hostility as well as love and that his behaviour may for a time be more 'difficult'. He may go through phases of being very demanding or jealous and, at times, will be defiant or use means to win her attention of which she does not approve. Unless she realises that these difficulties are signs that the child is really happier and less afraid and on his way to making real relationships in the Nursery School, she may be worried and think she is not handling the child wisely, or that she ought to be more severe. She may also need reassurance when the child settles down and appears not to want her so much, or even, because of his growing confidence, refuses her friendly advances. She has a right to know that these things are a sign that she has given real help and that the child is therefore able to make approaches to other adults and children.¹

However well the child has 'settled', he will at times need personal attention and then the adults should give it generously. The quality of the attention is often much more important than its duration. To give full and willing attention for a very few minutes will often satisfy a child for a long time, whereas a half-hearted, unwilling and cursory response may lead a child to show demanding behaviour for a long period. The most difficult child often shows very marked improvement, in many and often unexpected ways, once he is convinced that he is really loved and is able to give pleasure by his presence. One such child who was always getting into trouble overheard his teacher say, in humorous irony, 'Where is Ralph? I can't be happy if I haven't got him', and took the remark literally. For

¹An interesting research, which should be published soon, has been undertaken by Mrs. Hélène Baum on the subject of the newcomer's approach to the Nursery School group.

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

several days he would sometimes come up to her saying, 'You've got me now'. She had the wisdom to respond with warmth and pleasure and, after a few days, he settled down to much happier and more harmonious behaviour. It is often surprising to find how much improvement, at this early age, can result from what the busy teacher often feels are such small crumbs of personal affection, all that her time allows her to give to a child who is hungry for love.

During the years from two to five, the child is struggling with many problems of adjustment to a world which is often perplexing and which makes great demands upon his self-control. He often feels jealous when he has to share the attention of loved people who are at times preoccupied with each other or with other children. Parents often comment on how delightfully the child will behave with either of them alone and how difficult he can be when both are together. The child may find it easier to tolerate and accept such situations in the Nursery School, where the adults are of less profound importance to his feelings, but whenever he really loves, the problem has always to be expected.

He faces a similar problem, too, when he forms a friendship for another child and a third child intervenes. He often feels guilty about the jealous anger, particularly when his desire for a loved person's sole attention makes him feel hatred towards another and he sometimes tries to compensate for this by solicitude for the person he rejected. With the calm and steady affection of wise adults he gradually learns that he can share loved people without losing their love and that fantasies that his hostile wishes will do real harm or lead to rejection are not in fact fulfilled. This is another reason for the need of a firm but loving control, which will reassure him that we can protect ourselves and him, and which will in the end help him to be better able to tolerate and control his own feelings.

Another problem which children are facing at this stage, is that of their relative helplessness as compared with adults and older children, and it is a matter of great reassurance to them that they can learn to do many good and useful things to help the grown-up people and other children. They discover thus that not only we but they, too, can give good gifts and help to repair damage, clear away mess, and comfort and protect younger children. It is very desirable for Nursery School teachers to encourage and appreciate these efforts of the child but it is seldom wise to demand them. Helping to clear away a mess made by the child himself, toys he has scattered on the floor, for example, should, as he becomes capable of it, be regarded as a duty and if necessary demanded, but he should not be forced to perform personal services or to give his own toys to other children. Coercion in these matters is likely to stimulate an ungenerous attitude. The fostering of generosity comes from appreciation of services rendered and kindness shown, even when gifts are not entirely pleasurable objects from the adult's point of view and well-meant attempts to help are, in fact, rather a hindrance. One of the values of Nursery School life to young children, however, is that there are so many occasions when they can really give acceptable help and exploit their desire for power and mastery in ways which are desirable, or at least harmless.

Another matter in which we have progressed in Nursery School practice is that we are less concerned now with routine tasks of helpfulness and formal 'good manners' and more concerned with responding to the child's spontaneous expressions of good feeling. We are more inclined to ask for volunteers to help and less apt to impose such things as routine exercises. We no longer expect a child to sit with his dinner cooling in front of him until every child is served and see no particular value in insisting mechanically on

the words 'Please' and 'Thank you', though we use these ourselves and find the children are quick to pick up the expressions from us. It would be impossible for a child whose feelings for others were good and friendly not to acquire what are fundamental good manners, and minor matters of pleasant and courteous etiquette are 'better caught than taught'. Such things can be suggested to children (if they have not acquired them spontaneously) when they are a little older and interested in acquiring the skill of behaving in ways accepted by grown-ups.

What is to be avoided, at this early age, is to cause resentment and irritation by insisting on matters which have no motive which the child can understand and to make what should be sincere expressions of kindness and helpfulness into matters of dreary and mechanical conformity. We do not want to sacrifice the greater values to the lesser. In extreme cases of insistence on conventional table manners, for example, a child can lose what is much more important—his appetite for food. By the end of the Nursery School period he will easily have learnt to use table implements appropriately, but it is unwise to insist on it too early. Susan Isaacs' instance of a small child saying in bewilderment, '*Why* won't people do nothing if people don't say nothing?' is a vivid reminder of how puzzling an insistence on the mysterious word 'please' can appear to the very young child.¹ One child said to her mother, 'Do you mind if I have another piece of cake?' to which her mother replied, 'Say "please"'. Her father murmured, 'After all "Do you mind?" is very like saying "Does it please you?"'. It is an interesting question whether, in such a case, the child's behaviour was not more polite than the mother's!

¹'The Educational Value of the Nursery School', reprinted in *Childhood and After*, Routledge.

Another instance of bad manners from adults, of which we used to be guilty in Nursery School, was the practice of interrupting the child's spontaneous communication to us by requiring him to pronounce one of the words correctly. If we feel the need to help the young child to achieve better pronunciation, more vigorous use of the lips, etc., they sometimes enjoy joining in saying rhymes and jingles, but the best way of helping them to learn good speech is to let them hear it. The flow of language and mastery of words, which spring from the joy of communicating, may suffer a severe set-back if correct speech is required too early. Children will learn such things more easily at a later stage. In any case, the most we shall ever do for children with a strong dialect acquired at home, is to give them a second language of standard English, which they can use when required. Many older children speak one language at home and another at school, but at the Nursery School age the business of acquiring fluency in the use of language is of far greater importance and the key to good language development is a good social relationship.

As children develop friendly relations with each other much conversation arises between them. At first the motive of the young child may be chiefly that of making his own wishes known or protecting his own rights, but gradually the child finds increasing pleasure in telling other children of interesting events and achievements and in listening to what they have to say. Many suggestions for play are passed between children and sometimes sustained arguments and discussions take place.

Interest in Other Children

The period between two and five years of age is one in which the child's capacity to co-operate with other children shows a rapid development, if conditions are favourable to the encouragement of this growth. Even earlier than two years old, the child often shows considerable interest in other children—babies will watch each other closely from their respective prams and, provided there is a protective adult near at hand, will make exploratory advances towards each other.

On arrival in a Nursery School, the impact of so many children of his own age often alarms the newcomer and he may, for several days, remain very near to the adult and avoid the other children or tend to shrink back to the adult for protection if another child makes an advance towards him. Very soon, however, an observer will note that the new child is watching the other children very closely and before very long he attempts to establish contact with them. His first advances may be clumsy and may even, to an inattentive observer, appear to be hostile when they are, in fact, exploratory social advances. Pinching, pushing and even gentle hitting, may be the way a young child tries to express the meaning, 'Here I am, take some notice of me!' or, 'What kind of person are you?' It is easy to see from the child's facial expression how different this is from the really hostile hitting, pushing or pinching which comes from anger

or fear. One child, under three years old and rather new to an under-staffed war-time Nursery School, went round a circle of his contemporaries who were waiting for dinner, giving a gentle experimental slap at each child in turn. When one, equally gently, returned the salute he stood back and gravely contemplated those who hadn't done this and then gazed at the one who had, before advancing, more cautiously, to the next. His behaviour was an advance towards social relationships and a sign that before long he would be playing with other children. It is well known that the younger children play a great deal in the presence of other children with only occasional reciprocity, though clearly enjoying each other's company, so much so that if a child finds that the others have wandered away he will often follow them. But even from the earliest days in the Nursery School we find occasional friendly gestures and the germs of real co-operation.

From three and a half years onwards, co-operative behaviour increases very much and hostile behaviour diminishes.¹ There is also much play in which children use each other to further their own ends, and such play is helpful, both because it is the beginning of a discovery that pleasure can be afforded by other children and because it is the medium in which discoveries are made of other children's feelings and of the need to respect them if their company is to be retained. In this development the adult has a vital rôle to play; quarrels quickly arise when children's wishes clash, and it is the adult who at first makes the suggestions of taking turns, respecting rights, sharing toys and finding ways of getting alternative satisfaction without hurting or upsetting other children. If the adult is prepared to give patient, just and kindly help for a time, she notices that

¹K. M. B. Bridges, *Social and Emotional Development in the Pre-School Child*, Kegan Paul, was one of the first to give evidence of this.

children acquire these ideas and can play happily together for longer periods without needing so much arbitration.

Certain children seem particularly attracted towards each other. It used to be commonly believed that at this early age there was little discrimination and that a small child was ready to play with any other if proximity or the mutual desire for a particular game brought a child within his ken. We find, however, that this is by no means true of all children and, with some of them, very close friendships occur between two children and sometimes within a small group of children; in such cases children will often give up the occupations they want in order to join their friends. In cases of a close friendship between two children it seems that the children gradually come to accept a wider circle of friends and that the particular friendship plays a valuable part in leading them into wider contacts.

When a friendship is very strong it is wise for the adult to respect it. Real grief can occur if friends are ruthlessly separated or if one is absent and no one tells the other child where his friend is or what has happened. Tactful help is sometimes needed if one friend is over-dominant towards the other, or if, under the frustration of not being able to get his friend to play with him, the child attacks the unwilling one, thereby increasing his trouble by alarming the other child. Very poignant triangular situations can arise when one friend is temporarily or permanently attracted by a third child. No one who is free to make a careful study of these relationships can doubt that the loves, hates and jealousies of small children are as complex and difficult as they can be in later life.¹

The Nursery School teacher needs much intelligence, sympathy and knowledge to deal wisely with such situations.

¹An interesting research on this subject, which it is hoped will soon be published, has been carried out by Miss Irene Grove.

INTEREST IN OTHER CHILDREN

It is not easy for an inexperienced person to realise that a child who hurts and frightens another child may be passionately devoted to what appears to be his victim and, while he needs help in restraining his aggressive acts and finding more skilled ways of winning the response he longs for, no good will be done by increasing his pain by severity and scolding. It is by no means easy for a busy teacher even to be sure that she is arbitrating fairly in a simple quarrel. So often the child who is weeping attracts our sympathy, whereas his opponent may have suffered a good deal before he retaliated and caused the tears. A gentle enquiry as to what the trouble is about will nearly always produce the truth, if the adult is loved and trusted and can be relied upon to sort out the ethics of the case without severity or harshness.

Young children have a deep-seated conviction that adults ought to know everything and seldom show resentment even if another child reports their misdemeanours to a loved teacher. The ethics of not being a tale bearer belongs to a later stage of childhood and it is unwise to complicate the already complex lives of little children by refusing them the right of appeal, apart from the practical consideration that on occasions the safety of children, and consequently our own tranquillity, depends on the fact that if a child does anything very irregular, such as eating strange berries, or slipping through an open door into the street, the other children will be likely to report it. There is much evidence available now about the social behaviour of children of this age, and the Nursery School, with its programme so largely consisting of free play, has afforded an admirable laboratory for research workers in this field.

The readiness with which young children accept the presence of friendly, unobtrusive adults is a most valuable aid to research workers. Once the children's first curiosity

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

about the observers is past they will behave spontaneously in their presence. It is much more difficult to study the full spontaneous social behaviour of children in the upper Infant or Junior School, when there is a much greater reserve and when children often lead a secret social life among themselves, which would probably not be fully revealed to grown-ups, however much they were loved, and still less to unfamiliar research workers.

As children reach the five-year-old end of the Nursery School they tend to play in rather larger groups, though seldom in groups of more than five children unless held together by the participation of an adult. There are instances of children combining together for short periods, even against an adult, and keeping secrets among themselves. The tendency to exploit others for their own ends has diminished, or is achieved by considerable tact! There are many instances of charmingly co-operative behaviour and of kindness to younger children, though the groups of children who tend to play regularly together are usually of approximately the same age. As Susan Isaacs has pointed out, co-operation within the group is often sustained by projecting hostility on to other children outside it.¹ One child who sought admission to a group was specifically told by the others that if he would go and hit a particular child he might join! Sometimes quite elaborate rules are made by intelligent children before admitting a member to a group. One group, who were playing at being monkeys, would only admit a child who first 'got a tail' by having a piece of string attached to his clothes.

There is a good deal of fluctuation in the composition of many groups, though others remain fairly constant. Groups of children who play together out of school may hold together when they enter school, occasionally in rather larger

¹*Social Development in Young Children*, Routledge.

numbers than is otherwise usual. As they settle into the Nursery School, however, they generally acquire some new playmates also. Both in group formations and in personal friendships the sexes are often mixed.

There is no doubt that children who have been to a good Nursery School enter the Infant School with a more confident and friendly approach to other children than do those whose contacts with children of their own age have previously been very limited. Some psychologists are inclined to the view that full social development may never be wholly achieved unless children have been given the opportunity to know each other in the pre-school period.

The value of a Nursery School for social development is very great, for only children and for children from very small families, or for those whose homes shelter them from the daily impact of other young children. Growth from individualistic to co-operative behaviour is often very rapid in such cases. On entry, children from more sheltered homes are sometimes not so co-operative or helpful as are those from less sheltered homes, but if the teacher gives time and trouble to helping them to see the point of view of other children she is often surprised at the transformation which may take place in a few months, both in their behaviour towards other children and in their eagerness to help her instead of expecting to be waited on. One teacher who, when ordered by a new four year old child to bring in his toys from the garden, said, 'I can't—I've got to look after all the babies', was interested to find that a few days later he said, 'I'll take in all the spades, because you've got to look after your babies'. To such children, the joy of playing a grown-up and protective rôle, instead of being treated as a baby himself, is one of the real pleasures of going to a Nursery School. The same child, who on entry

had appeared to be quite regardless of the needs of other children, before the end of his first term was seen to stop an exciting game he was engaged in to pick up a small child who had fallen over, take him to the teacher for safety, and do a funny dance to make him laugh, before returning to his own play.

The opportunity for co-operation between children of different ages is frequently made available by the increasing practice in Nursery Schools of organising children in so-called 'family-groups' of mixed ages. There is no doubt of the value to older children of opportunities to help the younger and to the younger in learning from the older and also possibly in getting easier access to the adult, since there may be less competition from the older children.

We must, however, remember that the younger children also need opportunities to help, and the older to learn. The mixed age group requires generous staffing and a teacher who will be on the alert to safeguard the younger from getting too much help or well-meant interference, and the older from having insufficient intellectual stimulus. Four-year-old children need stories and music to suit their own age and opportunities for constructive play which will not be disturbed by younger children. Development is so rapid in these years that the intellectual needs of the older children are very much in advance of the younger and this disparity probably accounts for the fact that in their play and closer friendships they tend to seek contemporaries. There is also a danger, unless the group can sometimes be separated, that the pace of life will be too fast for the younger children and that all the opportunities for helping will be seized on by the older children as, indeed, is the case in some actual families and from which the younger child may need relief.

INTEREST IN OTHER CHILDREN

The growth in social co-operation and in the ability to control feelings which is evident in the period between two and five years in children who are mentally healthy, is helped by many factors of which the greatest are an understanding love and the provision of rich opportunities for play.

3

Learning and Thinking



We have seen how important it is for the child's mental health that he should have full opportunities for learning, how his understanding and mastery in the world of real people and things make for happiness and a greater reassurance. It is valuable to consider under what conditions his learning develops best. There is no doubt that in this matter of learning a healthy baby in a normal home does very well. Gesell and others have shown us what tremendous progress is made in the first two years. The child's growth is gradual and involves no sharp and sudden breaks and his education likewise should proceed by gradually adding to, not departing from, the conditions under which his first education was so satisfactorily achieved. Of these conditions the main ones are:

1. *An environment which contains objects to stimulate his curiosity and interest.* To young babies, almost every object is unfamiliar and presents opportunities for exploring with the senses, investigating and experimenting, which lead to further discoveries of its properties. At the Nursery School stage the child may need new objects and experiences, and the variety of toys and material which he finds there, the objects, animals and plants to which the teacher draws his attention, all add to his experience and encourage further investigation. For children who come from homes which cannot provide these, this is one of the great values

of the Nursery School. People, of course, create the most important aspect of the environment and the child finds new people to get to know. For children from secluded and sheltered homes this may be the greatest value. At the lower end of the Nursery School there is seldom any doubt that the environment is sufficiently stimulating. Teachers would sometimes, however, be well advised to consider whether this is always so for the older children. The following questions might be put:

(a) Do we expect them to remain satisfied with apparatus and toys which are too easy for them? Are there enough more advanced constructive toys? Do we provide enough raw material, simple tools and dramatic properties for the older children's use?

(b) Do we take them out enough or bring new experiences to them? Do we use the child's interest in events outside the school in his home or town?

(c) Do we ensure that things the children have begun to make are available again the next day, and provide places where they can be left undisturbed and found again by children who may want to finish what they have begun to make?

(d) Do we provide places where older children's more elaborate buildings and structures can be protected from casualties caused by other children? Do we give time to discussing them with the children?

(e) If older children are still using the rest period for sleep, are they thereby missing all opportunity for activities enjoyed by children engaged in quiet play at this time, or are these activities available also at other times of the day?

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

(*f*) Do we provide enough stories and music to suit the older children or do we expect them to make-do with no more than will be enjoyed by three-year-old children?

(*g*) Are we careful to let the children know when a story or music for their age group is to take place?

Another question we might usefully ask is whether we might, from time to time, make use of special occasions for giving new experiences.

Small children, as we all know, like the security of a steady routine, but they can enjoy occasional changes and these may extend their intellectual horizons and bring fresh experiences for their minds to work on.

The preparations for a Christmas or Easter party, if the children are allowed to help, in the special cooking, in the making of serviettes and decorations or paper head-dresses, ornaments for a Christmas tree or little nests or baskets to contain Easter eggs, will give the children fresh ideas for their own play. The occasional picnic or expedition, for the older children especially, is very helpful. A special play hour when the grass is cut for building grass houses, the making and flying of simple kites on a windy day and many such additions to the normal experiences of the children, will be thought of by resourceful teachers. Some of these could be for groups of children rather than for the whole school. Birthday celebrations, for example, are often more enjoyed if the child can prepare for and invite some special friends to a simple party at tea time or at mid-morning lunch, than if the whole school is gathered together for a rather routine procedure of lighting candles or singing a birthday song. Some children find this more embarrassing than pleasurable and it might be well to allow some choice of what the child would like to do on his birthday.

We sometimes forget how many interesting things and places, quite near at hand, have never been experienced or visited by young children and we often notice a great enrichment in the ideas a child will bring to his play, after such a visit. Incidentally, the children themselves often arouse the much needed interest of the public in the value of Nursery Schools and in the potentialities of young children. When people outside are able to see something of a Nursery School group of children they are less inclined to feel that the ratepayers' money is being wasted!

2. *Freedom to concentrate and to learn by experience.* The baby is allowed to learn at his own pace and in his own way—to rest when he wishes and to concentrate for as long as his interest holds his attention. He is also allowed to learn by active first-hand experience and words are added to his experience, not imposed on him. A good Nursery School reproduces all these conditions. The timetable provides for long spells of play during which the child can relax or change his occupation or sustain his attention and effort. In earlier days many schools, even for young children, had too rigid a timetable and children were constantly moved on from one form of activity to another, or gathered together for oral instruction. As children pass into the upper part of the Nursery School most of them enjoy organised periods of stories and music, but even here these experiences are also given spontaneously when the child seeks them and nearly all the information he receives is given in spontaneous situations when the child shows an interest.

Language development is fostered by spontaneous talk between teachers and children and between the children themselves. In earlier days children were gathered together for language 'lessons' and such talk as there was at these times was generally of a rather impoverished and stereotyped kind and undertaken only by the more articulate

children, who were capable of much better language when really interested. These 'lessons' and the set periods for the use of specific apparatus have disappeared from Nursery Schools in recent times, as have set periods for toilet training, domestic activities and physical exercise. It is not that these matters are neglected now, but we know that they are better furthered by giving children individual help and experience than by providing simultaneously for all the children together.

3. *Participation by the adult.* The baby in a normal home is sure of the interest of the adult and if he is deprived of it his development will always lag behind his full potentiality. A good mother and father are quick to notice and enjoy the child's achievements and to offer objects or verbal comments which encourage the baby to further successes. In the swing of the pendulum, which has rightly moved away from giving systematic instruction to children in groups, there has been some confusion about the true rôle of the teacher. During the war years, especially when staff were few and often not fully trained and hours were long, it was perhaps natural that when the children were engaged in play the adults withdrew to attend to other matters. There are, however, even some trained teachers who are inclined to think that their function is no more than to provide material and to intervene in cases of danger or over-aggression and who fail to notice how clearly the child is showing his need for the stimulus of encouragement and approval or for help or information. The following instances, recorded at my request by an experienced Nursery School teacher from Australia, who was puzzled at the tendency among some of our teachers at that time to withhold help in such matters, illustrate the kind of situation in which the adult could have played a much more useful rôle:

A girl (about 3½ years) was seated at a table with an

inset board. She shook all the pieces on to the table, then put down the board and tried to replace them by putting one piece after another over the spaces and pushing hard with the palm of her hand. She next tried turning her hand about and rubbing it over the board, still pressing hard. One piece fell into place. She tried the same method again, but without any further success. After a minute she called to another girl, 'look at me', but was ignored. She sat watching other children for a moment then began again rubbing a piece of the puzzle over the board, without success. She knocked two pieces to the floor and stopped to look at them. She then dropped the remaining pieces, one by one, on the floor, got up and ran outdoors. Later the teacher picked up the pieces, put them in the puzzle, and put it on the shelf.

A boy ($4\frac{1}{2}$ years) was at the carpentry bench. He took a small piece of wood, approximately 6 in. $\times$ $2\frac{1}{2}$ in., and said to the boy beside him, 'This is my boat, it's my boat'. He hammered three large nails more or less on the centre line of the wood (funnels?). He then took his 'boat' to the water-play tub, which was deserted. He placed the boat carefully on the water; it capsized immediately. He righted it, and again it turned over as soon as he let go. For several minutes he experimented trying to get it to float the right way up. The teacher walked over and noticed what he was doing, after a moment she said, 'Billy, if you want to play with the water you'd better put on your apron'. Billy muttered something I could not catch. He lifted the boat out of the water, and took it to the window where he propped it on end against the glass. Here it remained all morning.

A girl (4 years) found a beetle on the doorstep; she squatted down to watch it and was joined by two other girls. The teacher came over and stood watching. One of

the children put her hand over the beetle. The teacher said, 'You'd better not touch it, I'll put it on the garden'. She slid a sheet of paper under the beetle and carried it to a flower bed. The children watched it for a few minutes, but made no attempt to touch it again. They giggled and pushed each other, and eventually went into the playroom together. Later I noticed the girl who had first found it again leaning over the flower bed, but there was no sign of the beetle.

A boy (4 years) said to his teacher, 'My Gran came from London, she did, she came in a blue coach'. The teacher said, 'Did she, dear?' smiled at the child and patted his shoulder. She then moved away. Later, out of curiosity, I asked the child, 'Did you go to meet your Gran when she came in the coach?' He had done so and was eager to talk about it. Several other children joined in, they had all had coach trips.

Two boys (three-year-olds) found a spider's web between a post and the fence. The spider was still spinning. One child went to fetch the teacher and returned pulling her by the hand. She said, 'What is it, what have you found? Oh! a spider. We had better move it out of the way.' She picked up a stick and broke the web so that the half with the spider fell against the fence. The children shrieked with excitement. They crowded round the fence but the spider vanished into a crack. The teacher said, 'It's gone now, you can get on with your play'.

A boy (about three years) was fingering chestnut burrs. He pressed one finger gently against the points. He looked up at his teacher and opened his mouth as if to speak, but hesitated. She smiled at him and moved away.

The observer adds: 'I have chosen these examples especially because when each incident occurred the teacher was not occupied with any activity, nor was the child

absorbed in creative play. I could see no reason at all why the teacher ignored the opportunity to meet the child's intellectual needs, more especially as in most cases no more than active interest and a few words were needed (at least to begin with). It was surprising, as in other ways they were all such good teachers, and meeting the child's physical and emotional needs so well. I wonder if some of the 'irritable' behaviour one sees in the older boys in the Nursery Schools may be partly due to lack of intellectual stimulation?'

Perhaps more could be done in the Nursery School teacher's training to encourage students to notice such incidents and think out what help they should give if such an incident occurred again and to record instances in which they had given the right kind of help, or failed to do so.

I saw a young Nursery helper watching a group of children who had mixed so much water with their flour that they could do nothing with it and had long ago exhausted their interest in the sticky mess of material. She looked quite shocked when I showed the children how to fill a dredger with flour, shake it on to the dough and get it to a consistency with which they could model rolls and cakes, though the children's pleasure was quite evident. I am sure she thought such 'interference' on my part was quite unjustifiable!

One student, in her third year of training, specifically told me that she never contributed any ideas to the children when at play, unless it might be in the case of a child quite new to the school who could not get started at all. It is, of course, a subtle art to contribute in a right way which is in line with the children's interests and does not cut across them. I am even nervous of stressing the duty of the teacher to teach, lest I should be interpreted as advocating

a didactic approach which would override the child's purpose by imposing our own, or supporting a policy of returning to formal instruction of children in groups, or favouring attempts of over-zealous teachers to impose group 'projects' or even to begin systematic instruction in reading or arithmetic. Human nature appears to favour extremes, but we shall not help the child's intellectual growth either by premature instruction or by total neglect of his desire to learn.

No intelligent teacher would refuse help to a child who wanted to read particular words or sentences or to count, measure or weigh for his own specific ends, but even intelligent children under five are still, on the whole, much more interested in gaining first-hand experience than in abstract signs and symbols, and our part at this stage, in preparing children for reading later, is to show them that interesting stories and information are contained in books, post-cards and letters, that the labels on their pegs are useful and that communications can be sent in writing. While some children will easily recognise certain words when they see them in print, we are wise not to attempt to hurry them to acquire the skill of reading. There is a danger of strain to their eyes, especially at an age when visual perception of conventional form is less easy than it will be a little later, and there is so much that children, at this early age, can be learning from first hand experience of the fascinating world around them, and from the sayings and doings of people, that they seldom feel a real wish, except occasionally for short periods, to seek their knowledge from books. They are often interested in questions of size, weight and number, but it will be some time yet before the written 'sum' will have any reality for them. Counting and calculating will, however, often arise and, as with all intellectual interests, should be encouraged when they do arise, but not

be imposed. There is no special learning value in the Three Rs. The child's scientific and human interests and his desire to explore the nature of his environment are equally worthy of respect, but to some teachers these matters are not thought of as 'learning' at all!

I was amused at a teacher of older children gazing in puzzlement at a Nursery Class where the children were busily engaged in many experiments and in much creative and dramatic play, in which he could obviously see no value, suddenly come to life when a small boy flitted past him with the comment, 'I've got two biscuits'. The child was evidently feeling mischievous and possibly expecting a reproof for having annexed an extra biscuit, but the teacher was rapturous and said, 'Good boy, *one two, one two*', and then turned to me and said, 'You see, they *are* learning something!' The child, who could probably have counted a much larger number of objects, gazed at him in astonishment! Another example to him, no doubt, of the mysterious unaccountableness of grown-ups!

Some young children appear at times to be anxious to learn to read or 'do sums' because of parental pressure or rivalry with older siblings, but we usually find that as the young child gains happiness and confidence in a stimulating environment he is content to wait for these skills. If he is one of the very rare children who is really ready to start at so early an age, he will learn with a minimum of help from us. With most children who are taught these skills very early we find that, even if they are acquired, laborious months are needed to impart skills which would need only a week or so if we waited for greater maturity, or would be acquired spontaneously through the child's experience and questions. Moreover, as with all premature teaching, we inflict damage to the child's eagerness to learn and cut him off from much more important ways of learning by thus

wasting his time. It is possible to exploit the adaptability of young children and their desire to please us. If we watch them closely and objectively they will show us when an interest is or is not genuine. One teacher, who had provided coins and bills for a Nursery School shop, noticed that the children never used these things and, on listening to their conversation, heard the shopkeeper say, 'Very well, madam, I'll send it up'. She realised that to these particular children shopping was not a matter of exchanging coins and giving a receipt at the time of purchase. In many other situations, however, they were interested in number and in the shopping play there were many other values, but it would have been less enjoyed if she had insisted on the use of what she had offered as a contribution to their play. A less wise teacher was trying to impose the idea of giving a 'concert' upon a class of young children and, when I asked a little girl what she was going to do with a Chinese lantern she was making, she looked rather bewildered and then said, 'I think I've got to hang it on the concert'.

I remember, many years ago, two classes of five-year-old city children on one of which the idea of making a farm had been imposed by the teacher, while in the other there was a real interest in making a house by nailing and painting calico on a framework of a towel horse. The children in the first class could seldom succeed in reading or writing the word 'Farm' correctly, although it was constantly presented, whereas the children in the other class never failed to read and reproduce the word 'calico' even when they saw the word upside down. So great is the stimulus of a genuine interest and equally great the protective power of children against retaining ideas imposed upon them.

I have given examples of the wrong ways of trying to help children and the dangers of neglect. What of the right

ways? The skill of a gifted teacher is so unobtrusively shown that it is not always easy for a casual visitor or an inexperienced student to realise the variety of ways in which she is helping to foster the children's purposes and lead them on to fresh achievements. A few examples may illustrate some of these.

(1) At the time of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II it was evident that the interest of a group of four-year-old Nursery School children had been aroused. The teacher made one crown and put it in the playroom. The children were eager to wear it and made others. They found a suitable dress in the box of clothes for dressing up and built a coach with wooden boxes. They were taken by their parents to see the Coronation film. After this experience they demanded a train. The teacher provided a heavy piece of satin-like cloth of a purple colour. After this, for several days, a group formed and enacted the Coronation scene. The play was quite spontaneous but very dramatic; the children's movements were slow and solemn. In this instance, the teacher's part lay chiefly in the provision of the right material at the right time.

The other incidents which follow show how frequently a good teacher will do this and how her warm and active interest in the children's achievements will lead her to help them in other ways also. She sometimes participates in their play, when to do so will give them helpful ideas, makes useful suggestions and responds to those made by the children. She gives incidental information when interest is aroused and puts the children in the way of gaining fresh knowledge and experience. She is quick to recognise a child's problem and help him to solve it, and to realise when a question, comment or demonstration from her will lead the children on to fresh achievements and can carry their interests into wider fields.

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

(2) After a Christmas party, when the children had been interested in a puppet show, the teacher provided knitted glove puppets to fit the children's hands. The children arranged the Wendy house, with the window open, as a puppet theatre. At first the play was largely confined to making the puppets bob in and out in a lively way. The teacher then played with one, too, and made her puppet demonstrate a wider range of movements. Later she provided a theatre and put up a looking glass so that the children could watch the movements of their own puppets. This resulted in the children making much more varied movements with their own puppets. One day a child said, 'Tell us a story about puppets'. The teacher suggested that they should hold their puppets and make them do what the story said. Later she asked three children to give a puppet show for the others to watch. The play developed very much and became lively and original, the children contributing fresh ideas of their own.

(3) The children found a worm in the garden and wanted to find more. The teacher suggested that they should look in the compost heap, because worms like old leaves and dampness. They found worms and at first put them in match boxes, till the teacher suggested a bigger box with more soil and old leaves to make it nearer to 'What the worms want to live in'. This information incidentally given, was eagerly seized on by the children and such incidental help was also found to promote deeper interests in animals, for example in feeding the guinea pigs, looking at the young ones and gentle handling of them. The teacher often took the initiative, for example, in drawing the children's attention to a spider spinning, taking the hamsters out to run on the table where the children could easily watch them, etc. It is very evident that where a teacher is interested in the natural world the children

are quick to catch the interest, just as an artistic teacher, though she never demonstrates, is able to make an atmosphere in which children's pictures are more alive and vivid than with a teacher who is less interested in art. Encouragement of and enthusiasm for the children's efforts are very inspiring.

(4) A little boy broke his toy glider and the tailpiece was lost. The teacher said, 'Can't we make another piece?' She helped him to find an appropriate piece of wood and he affixed it, but it did not weight the glider as well as the original piece had done and the child was dissatisfied and quite clear about what he wanted to achieve. The teacher offered drawing pins to weight it and the child experimented with where to put these. His first efforts made the glider 'nose dive' but he ultimately achieved success.

(5) A little girl, visiting the lavatory said, 'I'm in the middle lavatory, there's one on each side'. Later, the teacher pointed out that she was washing in the middle basin. The child said, 'Oh, yes, two one side and two the other'. She later found the middle locker and middle peg in the cloakroom.

(6) Some children were painting. Their pictures were dashed off very rapidly and there were constant requests for more paper. The teacher began to ask children, 'What is your picture about? Tell me the story of it'. She wrote down the stories on the pictures in the child's own words and read them back to the child. Later, another adult said, 'What's this?' and read it aloud. The child realised that his picture had been recorded in speech and, after that, the pictures immediately improved and it was clear that the children attached greater importance to them. They also became very fluent in telling spontaneous stories and verse and often came to the teacher with requests that she should take one down.

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Examples of stories by boys aged four¹

Once upon a time there lived an old badger and he always used to live in a little hole underneath the earth, and he always used to go out for a walk to get his shopping, and he got a tin of condensed milk, and a tin of baked beans and a little tiny musical box, and a tin of autumn fruit and a pound of grapes and often a couple of pounds of apples, and then he went home, ate a few things, one or two grapes and a few beans that he'd got, and some tinned steak and some mashed potatoes and one or two apples and a few bits of apples and a few grapes and then he went out again, for a little walk again, to get some fruit, some wild fruit, and then when he'd got enough fruit, he thought, he went home, and then he went out again to get some more wild fruit such as strawberries—he got a few strawberries, and a pound of acorns, and he always went out to get his newspaper. (And that's the end.)

Once upon a time there lived a little small snake and it lived in a little hole underneath the earth, and once a little fox lived nearby and his name was Alexander Fox and it often went out to see the little snake and the little fox stayed the night quite often and there was often quite a lot of food, only the food wasn't what foxes and snakes like to eat, and the snake was often quite cross and near there there lived a beetle and the beetle flew, and it often flew to see the little snake and the snake always rather wanted to say, 'Hullo'. (That's the end.)

Chapter 1. Once upon a time there was a wolf, and he came dashing along the road, and he got run over. Then a

¹For these stories, and the instances given above of helpful participation by the teacher, I am indebted to Miss Irene Grove, of the Chelsea Open Air Nursery School.

man came along and he thought the wolf was alive, and he touched him and the wolf came alive again, because the man was a wizard. And the wolf ate up the wizard and took away his wand and turned himself into a man, and then he was a man wizard and he was the same wizard and the wolf was dead, and he'd been dead for always really. (Wasn't it a funny story and it was a dream really.)

Chapter 2. Once upon a time there lived some plumbers and they were wolf plumbers and they came dashing along the road to a broken house and they mended it up, and when they had mended it up the house became alive and then they said, 'What a funny house'. And it had been dead and it was alive for always. And then a fairy house came along and turned him dead again, and he had been dead for always—that's the end.

Stories by girls aged four

Once upon a time there was a lovely, lovely seed and it was going to grow into a lovely apple tree and, before it grew, someone came and took the seed out and put it in the dustbin, and the tree grew in the dustbin, where there was no earth and no water, till one day someone came, it was a little girl, and she took the apple tree and put the apple tree in the earth and dig dig with her little spade. Then she went to sleep for a whole two nights and then till one day she said to herself, 'It's too hot in my bed'. So she got up and she dressed herself and went downstairs and looked in the garden, but there was no apple tree in the garden, so she went upstairs again and got into bed and slept for a whole three weeks, and then she went downstairs again, looked in the garden and saw a lovely apple tree, and she picked some off, until there was a knock at the door and it was the postman and it was

her birthday, and she opened the door and found there was a lovely bicycle and she jumped on and rided along. Till one day Mummy and Daddy were walking along to the Zoo and then she said to herself that she'd go with Mummy to the Zoo—but she saw a lion who put his head out and couldn't get it in again, and Mary came and pushed it in, but it wouldn't go in so she put her head in and she was eaten up, and then Mummy and Daddy were so unhappy that they had to have another baby, but they couldn't find another baby, so they went home and slept for a whole year and then they went out and they saw a lovely baby in a shop and they took it home and it was a girl called Mary Browning, like me again.

Once upon a time there was a fish who lived on the bottom of the sea. One day a sea-lion knocked at the door and the door was a coral. One day a fish came along and it came down to the bottom of the sea and said, 'What are you doing today?'

Once upon a time there was a little pony who lived alone in a stable with a very old cow. One day the farmer's wife came along and said, 'What are you doing here, little pony? I only thought the old cow was here, when I came here before.'

Then the old stable started to move and then the farmer's daughter came up, full of laughter, because she never thought that was going to happen before, and one day a little pig came up to the stable and said, 'Hullo, farmer's wife, can I live here?'

In the very important matter of helping children to acquire language the good teacher is of immense value, both as a sympathetic listener and as a contributor. As the

child grows older we use language more and more as a means of giving him fresh knowledge and we find him using it more as a medium for thought and reasoning, and for passing on his experience to others. The best way to help the children to acquire more language is to add words to their experience in spontaneous situations. Children often enlarge each other's vocabulary in this way. A group of children were playing in a pirate ship. One said, 'They don't have engines. We need a sail and a steering wheel.' The teacher helped them to find appropriate material and to rig these up. One child said, 'If there's no wind the ship will stay in the middle of the river', and another said, 'It's becalmed'.

It is, of course, important that a teacher should be able to enjoy the children's play and not be over-anxious to teach all the time. Fascinating things can happen without us, but if we are ready to come in when we are needed the interest grows for us as well as for the child. The active participation of the teacher in ways such as those I have illustrated is particularly needed in the upper Nursery School. With the very young children, personal interest and encouragement, protective care, and the provision of appropriate material are perhaps the main means of helping, but as the child grows older he is turning more and more to the outer world for satisfactions—he has a growing sense of reality, which makes him more critical of his failures to achieve the standard in his own mind and he is less satisfied with purely symbolic representations of his fantasy. He requires of us what we shall at times be willing to teach him and to give him the entry into our own knowledge and skill, for which he often craves. This tendency is, of course, still more marked in the Infant and Junior School, but we see its beginnings in the upper Nursery School. We show our love to the child partly by our

willingness to teach him, and if we refuse to teach it may be to him as if we withheld love.

With regard to the general picture of the child's intellectual development at this age there is no need to reiterate what has been already so generously provided in current literature. Susan Isaacs's book, *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, and her most valuable article, 'The Educational value of the Nursery School', are well known by teachers, and would repay re-reading in the light of recent developments in Nursery School procedure. A recent very helpful book, less well known to teachers in this country, is *Understanding Children's Play* by Hartley, Frank and Goldenson (Routledge).

I have selected a few particularly useful books for a short bibliography. Longer bibliographies are easily obtained, for example, in many of the American publications, but for busy teachers it is often helpful to have a shorter, more selected list. I am here confining myself rather to the practical application of what we know about the ways in which children learn, think and reason. We owe particularly, I think, to Dewey,¹ the realisation of how important the solving of problems is in the intellectual growth of children, and we know that young children often use manipulative and imaginative means of solving problems, although as they acquire greater fluency of verbal expression much reasoning is achieved through the medium of words.

We need to give children plenty of concrete material which will help them to solve problems and even at the level of manipulative problem-solving we can sometimes, by a leading question or demonstration, help the child not to give up in despair. If the child is at a loss we can sometimes say such things as, 'Could you reach it if you found something to stand on?' or, 'Could you make your tower

¹See, for example, *How We Think*, D. C. Heath & Co., Boston.

stand up if you put the big bricks at the bottom?' A child of under two years old was struggling to pack himself into a small toy truck; after experiencing the satisfaction of getting inside a box, he was obviously bewildered at his lack of success. His teacher put a nest of boxes on a table beside him and he at once began to play with it, discovering which box could, and which could not, be contained in another box. I should not like to claim that he saw the analogy between this experience and his previous one, but she was right in realising that the problem of size was likely to interest him and that he was attracted by the idea of putting things inside other things.

I have elsewhere stressed the value of imaginative play in the solving of emotional problems and it is important to remember that we need never consider there is no value in imaginative play if it leads to good thinking, even if we cannot see that it is at the moment leading to any new learning. Some parents, and teachers too, are still inclined to view the world of make-believe as mainly a place of escape from the demands of life or a compensation for unhappiness or lack of what is desired by the child. Some parents are worried if they feel that children are wasting time in 'babyish' play and yet we know that it is often the most intelligent children whose imaginative life is most vivid. While it is true that imaginative play may be used to satisfy wishes, provide compensation and enable children to adjust better to life by, at times, escaping from reality, the borderline between pure fantasy and more actively creative imagination is a very slender one in childhood and quickly passed over. How often a child who begins an imaginative game almost on the level of a day-dream will pass into a vigorous attack on real problems and exercise much self-discipline as his play proceeds. A very unattractive, physically disfigured, neglected child of

seven, who often used to start the evening in a play centre by dressing up in the most gorgeous Red Indian suit he could find and wandering about in it, would end by gathering a tribe of other children, constructing a wigwam and engaging in vigorous and energetic adventures, in which much self-control was involved. In the medium of imagination, laws and rules are evolved and often conformed to with touching self-control. I have known two very 'tough' Red Indians refrain from battle when others were taking possession of their wigwam because, as they put it, 'You see, we've just got married and are on our honeymoon across the sea so we can't get at them'.

If escape into fantasy is excessive, by which we mean that the child is failing to find satisfactions in the real world we may need to help him in other ways, but merely trying to prevent his imaginative play will do harm, not good.

Verbal reasoning too is often released at its highest level in the medium of imaginative play. The child draws on the experience of others, epitomised in words, and passes on his own experience to them in the same way, thus clarifying still further his own ideas. Surprisingly long sustained, logical arguments often take place between children when engaged in imaginative play, as well, of course, as in odd moments or at mealtimes, when some topic of interest arises. It is a help if the adult sometimes joins in the conversation of children when engaged in play and at other times too, for example, at meal times, and this is much more useful as a means of helping to foster verbal expression than a set language lesson would be. With the youngest children it is, of course, helpful to speak rather more slowly and distinctly than is necessary with older ones, but we should not be afraid of introducing new words sometimes. Children often understand them from their context

or, if not, may be prompted to ask and so their vocabulary grows rapidly.

Much thinking and reasoning is put into the matter of language, which is undoubtedly of great importance and interest to the child. It is often when children make mistakes that we notice how much thought has taken place; when the child succeeds we are often unaware of it. A little girl, who, having been told by her mother not to argue, said, 'All right, I won't arg you. I'll arg Nanny', reminded me what a triumph the young child has achieved when he has finally mastered the use of 'I', 'me', 'you', etc., which must be so bewildering at first. Mother addresses him as 'you', but he is not supposed to call himself 'you' and he has to call her 'you'! Contemplation of what the child has to cope with gives one a deep respect for his power of learning. A two-year old boy in a residential Nursery, to which he had been transferred, persistently called his new Nursery School teacher 'Cocky'. He did not use this term for Matron, housekeeper or nurses. After puzzling about it, I realized that in his previous Nursery he had had only two Nursery School teachers, Miss Silcock and Miss Hancock and I then understood how much thought had gone into sorting out the functions of the Nursery School teacher, as compared with the other adults, and then into sorting out the common element from his previous experience, in trying to supply the right name. No wonder the two-year-old's questions consist largely of the 'What's that?' order. His eagerness to find a name for the objects in his world is so great. Mixing with the older children is, of course, a great help to him in his quest for words. His questions, and those even more numerous questions of the three-year-old, deserve respect. As soon as the child can use language he seeks to extend his field of experience by asking them. Very early questions are also asked about the whereabouts of

objects, the possessors of objects and their functions. 'Where's it gone?' 'Whose is it?' and 'What's it for?' are frequently asked before the child is three.

The three-year-old is often also struggling with the difficult concept of time. 'When shall I be able to do it?' 'When is to-morrow?' What does next year, or even next week, really mean to a young child? It is doubtful whether even the concept of minutes and hours really mean much. The child measures time by his feelings. Five minutes of sitting quiet and still seem much longer to him, if he is bored, than twenty minutes of joyous play. But the child is interested in the idea of time. Three years old is a great age for 'How?' and 'Why?' questions. 'How' is generally easier to answer as it is more clear just what the child wishes to know. 'Why?' may mean many things, just as 'What?' does not always mean 'I did not hear you' but 'Say it again', so 'Why?' may be a mere request for us to go on talking to the child or repeat again what we said before. These questions can be irritating to a busy adult, but we must remember that the young child very much enjoys both the experience of being talked to and the repetition of familiar material, as we see in the way he requests a favourite story to be told over and over again. One intelligent little boy of two years and ten months had a more subtle way of coaxing his mother to go on talking to him. He would softly introduce the next few words and then pause enquiringly. His mother recorded the following dialogues.

Mother. Don't tip up your chair.

Child. Or else . . . ?

Mother. I'm going to the shop.

Child. To get . . . ?

Mother. I'll put this in the cupboard.

Child. So that . . . ?

Mother. Come in here and shut the door.

Child. And then . . . ?

Mother. Jane really wanted the little ball.

Child. But . . . ?

Mother. The dog got it.

Child. So . . . ?

Mother. Jane had the big ball.

'Why' can, however, mean, at its highest level, a child's reflective thinking over his own experience. As Nathan Isaacs has pointed out, some 'Why' questions are 'Whys of puzzlement' which arise when the child has formed, from his past experience, a generalisation and expects something to happen and then meets a set-back to his theory by an unexpected occurrence.¹ These questions are very deserving of serious answers or at least of showing the child that his previous generalisation has to be extended further.

We probably cannot actually explain to the small child why water won't 'stand up in the middle' like earth, sand, sugar and other substances, but we can at least help him to discover that this law applies to other liquids and then he finds he has made a new discovery and forms a fresh generalisation which qualifies the previous one that 'Every soft substance will stand up in the middle if you scrape it together'. Such questions are the basis of scientific thinking and should not be discouraged, ignored or laughed at.

Other 'Whys', as Piaget has pointed out, are 'Whys of motivation',² directed sometimes at our conventions, rules and customs or verbal idiosyncrasies or the many apparent inconsistencies of our own behaviour. And other 'Whys' are of protest. It is very doubtful whether the child

¹*Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, Isaacs, Appendix A; *Children's 'Why' Questions*, pp. 291 *et seq.*

²Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child*, Routledge, pp. 188 *et seq.*

who protests '*Why* must I go to bed?' would even listen if we attempted to explain the value of sleep! Sully's example of the child who in great distress asked why animals had to be killed and, after fiercely rejecting all the explanations offered, said piteously, 'You don't understand me',¹ is a reminder to us of how, in dealing with the child's question, we need to appreciate the feeling behind it. Piaget thinks that the 'Whys of motivation' are the basis of all 'Whys',² while Nathan Isaacs holds that the 'Whys of puzzlement' are equally fundamental. Perhaps we ourselves encourage the whys of motivation by our own tendency to use them to children, 'Why don't you eat your rice pudding?' 'Why can't you sit still?' etc. We seldom address to young children a serious request for an explanation of what is puzzling us, because we seldom feel less adequate than they are.

Children ask many other questions, besides those I have suggested. An interesting question sometimes asked by intelligent children of four years old is, 'What would happen if—?' Such a question shows that the child is attempting to estimate the effect on the future of changes occurring in the present. Children of this age, also, sometimes express interest in what is 'real' and what is 'alive' and are clearly trying to sort out the difference between animistic beliefs or fantasies and those things which actually happen in the world of external reality.

The question, 'Is it true?' is more often asked at six and seven years old, but sometimes occurs earlier.

The questions of four and five-year-old children are not typically as numerous as those of three-year-olds, partly because the child has more sense of there being an explanation for everything and can therefore be less impatient. He has also found out that we are not always able to answer

¹Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, Longmans Green, 1903 edition, p. 475.

²Piaget, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

everything and, being more sociable, directs some of his questions to other children. He is clearer about what questions are worth asking of which people and is less inclined to confront us with such baffling questions as, 'Why is that a cow?' or, to quote from Nathan Isaacs,¹ 'Why am I not in two all the way up?', asked by a child while looking at his feet and legs.

A four-year-old's questions often reveal quite an accumulation of knowledge and it is easier for us to understand just what he wants to know. One four-year-old, for example, asked his teacher, 'Do little lions grow inside their mummies like babies, or out of a seed like plants, or does someone have to sit on eggs?'

Such development by an intelligent four-year-old is, however, dependent on the child having been fortunate enough to meet people who have taken the time and trouble required to answer some of his earlier questions. If he constantly fails to get a response, or meets only with casual or foolish replies, he may give up asking and so cut himself off from many possibilities of further learning and expansion of his horizons. Young children are sensitive to our tone of voice and know if their questions do not please us. If they are confident of our willingness to reply, intelligent children will ask many questions. Among these it is very likely that there will be questions about their own origin and where other babies come from and it is, of course, of great importance that such questions are answered truthfully and simply. It is unusual for children if they are confident and of normal intelligence, not to ask such questions under the age of five. Questions about God and the origin of the world and questions about death are also very common. It is best to wait for the growing point in the child's own mind, generally expressed by a

¹Isaacs, *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*.

question or comment, before dealing with these questions. If we force teaching upon children before they are ready we often confuse and sometimes frighten them and too much information, given too early, may blunt curiosity and interest as surely as refusal to answer. We can tell by the child's facial expression and tone of voice whether the question is one which springs from distress or anxiety.

In the swing of the pendulum, from too much reticence, some parents today have gone to extremes in the opposite direction. One mother consulted me as to whether she was doing right in telling an adopted two-year-old, every week, about how she adopted her. She had noticed an increasing coldness on the child's part when she did this, but she was afraid, if she did not do so, the child would forget and then the information would come as a shock later. Naturalness is often worth more than taking anxious thought, but of course some of the questions young children ask are not easy to answer truthfully and in a way which they can understand and accept. A very useful book on the deeper questions asked by young children, is Len Challoner's *Questions Children Ask*. In teaching intelligent Nursery School children, the teacher will find plenty of use for an encyclopaedia! The scientific questions, of small boys especially, will often challenge the knowledge of the teacher, especially as Nursery School teachers are women and women are often less well informed in these matters than men. Helping the child to find out for himself is, of course, one very good way of answering a question and it is sometimes useful to ask children a further question oneself before attempting a reply. Even the question 'Why is that a cow?' might be clarified by asking, 'Why do you think it shouldn't be?' to which, if the child replied, 'Because it is black,' one would know that his previous experience of cows had been limited, whereas if he said,

'Well, it's such a funny word', one would know that it was a question directed towards our linguistic conventions. Children, too, sometimes answer each other's questions quite satisfactorily if given the opportunity to do so.

As Dr. A. G. Hughes has shown us in his interesting study of the scientific questions asked by his small boy the situations of mealtimes and toilet times, are particularly stimulating of scientific interest.¹ It is important that the teacher should be easily accessible at such times and not too busy with other matters to have time to answer the child whose intellectual curiosity is aroused.

It is impossible to over-emphasise the need for honesty in answering the questions of even young children, though it is well to limit the amount of information we give to what we know of the child's capacity to understand. One six-year-old boy who was given too long an explanation in reply to his question 'What is evolution'¹ replied firmly, 'No, I don't think so. I think Jesus made me. Anyway, it's much more amusing.' The Victorian instructive books for children, in which the parent speaks several pages of information in reply to a child's question, give good examples of the possibility of overdoing information, however accurate it may be. But we should not evade or lie. Not only do we lose the child's confidence in us if we do this, but we may well increase his anxieties. The occasions when sympathetic adults are most often tempted to lie are when distressing events, such as accidents or death, occur and they want to save the child from suffering. It is often the case that the truth, however distressing, may be more bearable to the child than the fantasies to which we expose him by a refusal to answer. If, for example, a child has lost a beloved grandparent, it may be even more painful for him to

¹'The Scientific Interests of a boy in Pre-school Years', by two Parents, *The Forum of Education*, Vol. vi, No. 1, 1928.

imagine that the person who has died cares so little for him that he will not trouble to come and see him, or that his own 'naughtiness' has driven him away. Piaget and others have reminded us of the tendency of young children to syncretism in their thinking.¹ This means that they are very liable to be hazy about cause and effect and imagine that any event occurring soon after another event has been caused by it. From this intellectual tendency, as well as from the unconscious fantasies of his own omnipotence, the child may very easily associate tragic events with his own behaviour, and we shall intensify rather than relieve his anxieties by a refusal to explain objectively what has really happened. It is often a greater kindness to let the child have the right to mourn and to be given what comfort we can offer. We are wise to avoid telling unnecessarily harrowing details of accidents and illness. If, however, the child has already heard about them it is better to let him talk freely to us than to hush him. Fears and anxieties, freely expressed, have less power to do harm than those denied and repressed.

¹ See, for examples, Piaget, *Judgement and Reasoning in the Child*, Kegan Paul, pp. 227 *et seq.*, and *The Language and Thought of the Child*, pp. 151 *et seq.*

4

Play and Mental Health



It is now a very well-known fact that play can help the child to maintain and sometimes to achieve mental health. In the days before this knowledge was as available to teachers as it is today one was often astonished, to the point of bewilderment, at the improvement of difficult, even semi-delinquent, children on admission to a good play-centre, even if only on two evenings in a week.

In 1930, when I opened my first play centre, which I expected that the children would enjoy, I had no idea that I should find that their teachers, or social workers who knew them out of school, would tell me how much the children's general behaviour had improved. It is evidence of the rapidity with which the knowledge that play has a therapeutic value has spread to teachers, that what came to me then as a revelation is today almost a platitude to young students fresh from college. In the early thirties, I laboriously attempted to find out how play could possibly help a difficult child, by recording the play of children in child guidance clinic playrooms and putting what I had observed of each child's play alongside what I could learn about him from the case records, which the clinics kindly allowed me to study. I did not gain much illumination from much hard work along these lines, but gradually discovered that in the clinical field there were people who had access to deeper knowledge and

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

understanding of the question which was interesting me and that a study of the children in my own play centre, whom I knew better, together with helpful consultations with clinical psychologists, threw much more light on the subject. Now such knowledge is widespread, but even before this was so, some teachers and very many parents had, since the earliest times, been aware that play was necessary to children and some very early writings reveal that one or other of the many values of play is not a new discovery of our times. Aristotle, for example, probably realised the therapeutic value of play when he said, 'Play should be introduced, under proper regulation, as a medicine'.¹ Plato says 'Our children, from their earliest years, must take part in all the more lawful forms of play, for if they are not surrounded with such an atmosphere, they can never grow up to be well conducted and virtuous citizens',² and again in his statement, 'Let early education be a sort of amusement, for that will better enable you to find out their natural bent',³ shows an awareness of the value of observing children at play in order to understand them better. Froebel's book, *The Education of Man*, especially the chapter on 'Man in Earliest Childhood', is full of references to the value of play, and Richter, in Book III *Levana*, makes the charming statement, 'The usual games of children, unlike ours, are the expression of serious activities clothed in lightest wings'.

We are, however, probably still not wholly aware of all the ways in which it is valuable, and some teachers give over-simplified explanations of the value of mere catharsis, i.e. the freeing or discharge of repressed feelings but, nevertheless, the more we study the child who is deeply

¹Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII, Chapter 3.

²Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV.

³Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII.

absorbed in play the more we are aware of the happiness and resilience which it brings.

Creative play seems particularly healing, but a child needs to have reached a certain release in his feelings before he can wholeheartedly engage in it. A good Nursery School is well supplied with materials with which the child can be creative—plastic materials such as damp sand, clay, plasticine and dough, constructive materials, bricks, planks and boxes, the various constructive toys such as matador and minibrix and dramatic properties and toys for representing the environment.

Also valuable for imaginative creativeness are materials for artistic expression such as paints, crayons and simple tools for cooking, carpentry and gardening. In this creative activity children have the opportunity to sublimate their infantile and primitive wishes and impulses. Clay and paint, for example, are materials which provide opportunities for making a legitimate mess as well as for creating attractive objects and pictures and which allow the child to externalise in symbolic form fantasies, fears, anxieties and wishes and symbolically to share these with other people.

Dramatic make-believe play is also very rich in the opportunities it offers for bringing into the outer world and turning into harmless and pleasurable game situations which, if merely repressed, might cause unconscious suffering or loss of energy and vitality. It was interesting to note how often, in the time of the air raids, the children played out the situation and also drew and painted it and how few children actually broke down under a situation which could not fail to have been known by them to be dangerous and capable of causing death. The situation was kept in the open by their play and, in fantasy, controlled, and the other children too contributed relief in their turn by

showing no fear but joining happily in producing the wail of sirens and the scamper to the shelters and in deciding when the 'all clear' signal should be given. Children sometimes play out situations of distress and difficulty and will often show to the experienced observer, as Ruth Griffiths, in her most interesting book, *Imagination in Early Childhood*, points out clearly, that they are working out a problem in symbolic form. One small boy, who had been very much in antagonism towards people in authority, constantly played at defying policemen, bus conductors, etc., at a time when he was just becoming able to establish a better relation with a new and sympathetic teacher, who was also enabling the grandmother who brought him up to accept him better. At a later stage, when confidence was still more established, he often played at himself being a bus conductor, in a rather masterful but quite benevolent way, after which his play gradually turned more in the direction of mastering objects and his ability to concentrate improved markedly. It is probably not true that play alone, would help such a child, but the combination of play with the support and affection of a sympathetic adult appeared to help him very much.

Aggressive children find very deep satisfaction in legitimate destruction and mastery of resistant material, such as is afforded by simple woodwork. I have known a Nursery class, which was troubled by four very aggressive small boys, transformed into a place of much greater peace and happiness when this kind of material was introduced. The previous equipment, which consisted largely of soft toys and didactic apparatus, with a Wendy House and dolls, but no stimulus for more masculine activities, had completely failed to satisfy them.

Play is, of course, valuable for its encouragement of muscular control which gives, in itself, a deep emotional

satisfaction and for its rich opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skill, with the satisfactions of understanding and controlling the environment.

The two-year-old is largely absorbed in exploring the environment with all his senses, especially those of sight and touch and, also, in simple experiments with objects to discover more of their nature and properties. But he too engages in imaginative play and there is probably much fantasy accompanying what is sometimes thought to be merely exploring and experimenting. It is not so easy to appreciate this as it is with the more articulate and realistic three-year-old, which is probably why there used to be a theory that imagination developed at the age of three. As Cyril Burt and others have clearly pointed out, the available evidence seems to contradict the notion that mental faculties suddenly emerge at certain ages.¹ Even before the child is two, a careful observer can note unmistakable evidence of make-believe play and it probably occurs long before the child has enough skill to show us what the imaginative activity represents.

Make-believe play is very valuable, not only for emotional satisfaction and release but also for the way in which it encourages logical thinking. As Susan Isaacs has pointed out, it is largely through imaginative play that the child learns to hold a hypothesis in his mind and sustain a logical argument.² How often we hear young children at play say such things as, 'If I am the Mummy I do the washing up and if you are the Daddy you go out to work.' In the situation of 'Let's pretend', their minds are busy at rejecting

¹See, for example the Board of Education Report on *Nursery and Infant Schools*, pp. 74-75, and on *The Primary School*, pp. 33-34, also Cyril Burt's article, 'The Differentiation of Intellectual Ability, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, June 1954.

²Isaacs, *Intellectual Growth in Young Children*, Routledge, pp. 104 et seq.

the unsuitable and searching for the suitable solution to their problems. One small girl, who wanted the little boy who was playing house with her to accept a visitor into the play, said, 'John, give this lady a cup of tea because she's rather young—No—because she wants one'. The last words were said very distinctly and deliberately and it was quite clear that the child realised that the first argument would not do and that a better reason had to be thought out.

There is no doubt, too, that make-believe play often leads the child to seek for and assimilate fresh knowledge and experience, and the sympathetic adult who joins momentarily in the play without trying to interfere or redirect it often finds that the ideas she contributes and the vocabulary she uses are eagerly seized upon and used by the children to lead on to fresh achievements.

From time to time the careful observer will note that the children are looking out for fresh ideas and opportunities. If these are supplied at the right moment, the play often enters on a new phase of enthusiastic expansion; if not, it deteriorates and may eventually fade away. Sometimes a visit to see something in which the children are clearly interested, or a picture or story related to this interest, may supply what is needed. At other times, a verbal comment or question is all that is required, or the provision of fresh material, or space secure from disturbance, may be of great help.

Clear thinking, the mastery of language and skill and the acquisition of knowledge are not only valuable in their own right, but also have a very stabilising effect on the feelings and give deep satisfaction. Some teachers who are very interested in the child's emotional needs and problems are inclined to overlook the fact that one form of therapeutic help is to provide a stimulating environment

for learning and intellectual development. Failure to understand is likely to increase fears and anxieties, and helplessness may in some cases amount to terror. As knowledge and skill increase the world feels a safer and more ordered place to the child.

Two to five is an age when attitudes are established and tendencies to neurosis may be prevented. Respect for the child's wish to learn and to master objects in the world around him may help, both in promoting his emotional stability and in establishing an attitude of intellectual zest, which will be a very good foundation for educational progress throughout his school days.

If the child clearly shows a degree of disturbance which is more than normal for his age, the Nursery School teacher may be helpful in recommending the parents to seek psychological help, at an age when such help is more easily and effectively given than is the case if problems are left till later. A sensitive and experienced teacher will recognise the signs of real disturbance. The over 'good' child who shows no resilience, or who constantly withdraws from the life around him, the child who cannot play, or who shows his difficulties by one very persistent symptom, are perhaps those in most need of close attention, since their problems are not so obvious to the casual observer as are those of children who show their difficulties more dramatically.

5

Parents and their Children's Problems



Parents who may have little experience of young children other than their own may be expected, unless they are very knowledgeable or are of a calm and easy-going nature, to become rather worried at times.

In the two- to five-year-old period many of the problems of behaviour common to young children are likely to occur in the normal course of events and it is important that parents and teachers of young children should realise that the understanding love that children need from them at this age means not only the ability to feel and express warmth and tenderness, but also to tolerate and understand all the difficult behaviour which is normal at this age. Long-term research studies, in which parents and children are frequently visited and interviewed for many years, have given us an opportunity to learn how frequently problems of behaviour are shown in normal children of Nursery School age.

Problems which are most often raised by parents of children aged two to five years, include:

Temper tantrums. These occur, especially at two years of age, and are caused by such matters as changes of routine, conflicts with authority, tight clothing, dislike of certain colours, suffering interference when trying to do something for themselves, quarrels about possession and personal failures. As the Nursery School period proceeds,

anger tends to be shown in more controlled forms, in rigidity and refusal to move or speak, in active 'contrariness' or, later still, by arguing or by turning a deaf ear to our requests. The child in a temper tantrum is liable to hurt himself or others and needs protective care until the paroxysm of rage has subsided. After it is over he may need comfort, but when he is calm again he will usually co-operate quite well in conforming to a reasonable request which may originally have angered him, and it may be wise not to pass over such matters, since some small children are quick to notice if a tantrum has resulted in a victory. If, however, the tantrum is due to acute fear, or anxiety, or to an unbearable degree of frustration, there is no need to fear that the child will use such outbursts as a means of getting his own way.

When a child is in the throes of his wrath, biting, kicking or screaming, it is a painful situation for him as well as for us and we shall only increase his difficulties if we ourselves become angry. We may need to restrain him by holding him firmly, or by removing him from contact with other children, but our own steady calmness is the chief means by which we help him to regain his self-control. Though he is inaccessible to reason while in a tantrum, he may be soothed by the sound of the voice of an adult speaking quietly and reassuringly, and some children respond well to being taken into another room or having their face and hands sponged with warm water.

Negativism and obstinacy are very common, especially at the early part of the period, when the child is beginning to realise himself as an independent person. Patience, good humour, and the provision of legitimate opportunities for the child to exercise power and make choices, will help him to pass through his negative phase. Parents are often worried when a previously dependent baby begins to

assert his independence, especially as the ways in which he does it are at times apparently quite unreasonable. Once parents realise that the child is passing through a normal phase they generally handle the situation wisely. If not, they may increase the difficulty by attempting to 'break the child's will'. While they should not be afraid to be firm, on occasions when the child is being unreasonable, there is all the difference between good-tempered cheerful firmness and the anxious type of struggle, such as one mother described to me by saying, 'I'm nearly worn out but, thank heaven, I won'. The child is quick to sense the attitude of one who is, on the whole, sympathetic to his desire for independence and power and he quickly learns to conform to reasonable requests from such a person. When the child feels the adults are trying to 'get him down' the negativistic phase may persist long after it should have been passed.

Phobias and imaginative fears, night terrors and difficulty in sleeping. These problems are more evident to parents than to teachers, but may occur in school. They spring from deeper causes than we can control, but we can at least remember that no good is done by forcing a child to encounter an object, picture or person for whom he feels terror. It will help him most if we can show him that we sympathise with, but do not share, his fears. At this stage, stories and pictures of an alarming nature are best avoided. The child's own fantasies are certainly often more alarming than most stories, and for that reason, some people hold that telling such stories can do no harm, but in this early period, when the small child is liable to confuse fact and fancy and is often interested in sorting out the difference, it seems unwise that we, who belong to the world of external reality, should, with the prestige and power of giving suggestion with which the small child

invests us, engage ourselves in presenting 'horrific' material to him. We may well be the means of increasing rather than helping to modify his fears and of suggesting to him that we ourselves believe that terrifying things may really happen or that we are cruel people trying to frighten him. A little later, when the child is clearly aware of the difference between a story and the world of real experience, some, even of the more primitive fairy tales, may give great relief and be much enjoyed, but small children often clearly show terror and distress when such stories are told. One little boy burst forth to a student, who was telling an alarming story, 'Miss, if you goes on like this, I shall dream'. A whole class of young children showed unmistakable horror at the episode in the Hansel and Gretel story when the parents tried to lose the children and leave them to starve in the wood. When children are liable, from their own fantasies, to be afraid of monsters coming to eat them up there seems, at the least, no need to add Red Riding Hood's wolf to the collection. When children are still so enthralled by the romance of all the fascinating phenomena of the world around them and the tremendous variety of the sayings and doings of people and animals there is no need to draw on alarming material in order to give the children excitement and interest. Animals who speak and wear clothes certainly need not be debarred from Nursery stories and I have never known a small child who did not delight in the story of the Three Bears. We need not be prosaically realistic, and some of the fairy tales are enjoyed and are not at all alarming, even at this early period, but since stories are usually told to groups of children, it is well to remember that a story for which one child may be ready may be too alarming for another. If children have already heard alarming stories and show fear, the best help may be to encourage the children to

turn them into imaginative play, where the child can more easily realise that they belong to the world of 'make-believe' and make the story more homely and familiar by playing it. The same caution is needed if stories are selected from the Bible to be told to young children.

Some material, which would be very much appreciated by older children, may be the means of adding to the fears and anxieties of young children if given too early.

There are also other situations in the life of the Nursery School which are liable to symbolise to the child something of which he is unconsciously afraid. Some children react with panic to having their throats examined or temperatures taken, others may show phobias for the Nursery School lavatories, beds or certain pieces of apparatus. If these terrors are treated with sympathy and patience, the child gradually gains reassurance by finding the objects which alarmed him are, in fact, harmless and that other children do not seem to feel any fear. One little boy, who appeared to feel acute terror when asked to wear any overall which was brown, having been allowed for a long time always to wear those of other colours, gradually lost his fear, and when a new teacher, who did not realise his previous terror, one day put a brown overall on him, he made only a mild protest and subsequently wore one, at times, without any distress.

Parents are often concerned about these apparently irrational fears and some fathers are inclined to accuse small boys, especially, of cowardice when, for example, they are afraid to paddle in the sea. It may be very helpful in such cases if the Nursery School teacher can assure parents of how common such fears are in very young children, and how likely they are to be outgrown if the child is not forced. The worst trouble to the parents is, however, likely to be the incidence of night terrors and disturbances in sleep,

which may occur during this period even in children who have previously slept well. Some parents are afraid to go to a child who wakes in terror, or calls repeatedly for them on very flimsy pretexts after being put to bed. Parents have sometimes even been taught that, if they once yield to the child's demands, they will have to go on doing so for many years. Nothing is further from the truth. The child who feels that the parents are easily accessible and will be ready to give comfort and support is the child who most quickly passes through these anxieties and gradually ceases to make so many demands. Here again the Nursery School teacher may be useful to parents in giving reassurance. Many loving parents are only too glad to go to the child, once they are relieved of the fear that to do so is to 'spoil' him.

Feeding difficulties. Some foods are particularly disliked, and it is impossible to avoid including in a Nursery School menu some foods which are, for a time, repulsive to some children. It is, however, wise to refrain from providing foods which are particularly liable to be disliked, such as lumpy foods like tapioca, or those with a texture for which young children tend to feel a strong objection. Tripe, for example, is disliked by many small children. Attractive colour and arrangement of food is often a help towards overcoming dislikes, but patience and the avoidance either of worry or of attempts to coax or force the child are the best ways of encouraging good appetite. Children who are not forced or worried will gradually be more inclined to experiment and taste new foods and a casual suggestion on our part to see whether they like something new, may then be readily accepted.

Children's appetites tend to improve very much in Nursery Schools, where teachers are prepared to be patient and tolerant, and it may be a great help to the parents, if

they are inclined to worry, to know that the child has eaten well in the Nursery School. They will then be less afraid that he will starve if he does not eat so well at home, and the absence of worry on their part will, in its turn, help to relieve the difficulty over home meals. The impulse of the mother to feed her child is a very deep one and merely telling her not to worry is not likely to be very helpful.

Physical symptoms of emotional problems. Thumb-sucking, masturbation and nail-biting are forms of behaviour which often worry parents, but in mild degree are quite harmless. Some children go to sleep more easily if allowed to suck their thumbs. If there is much of it, especially at the later part of the period, it is a sign that the child is needing greater satisfaction in other ways. Boredom, through lack of interesting play, is often shown to us by an increase of thumb-sucking and the same is true of masturbation, which also is normal in moderate degree, and it is important that both teachers and parents should recognise that this is the case. Masturbation normally becomes secretive and hidden towards the later part of the 2-5 period. If the child is not attempting to conceal it by then, it may be a sign that he needs psychological help.

Nail-biting does not usually occur before four years of age, at the earliest; like thumb-sucking and masturbation it may spring from such feelings as loss of love, jealousy or loneliness, anxiety about aggression and lack of satisfying interests in the outer world. It indicates greater anxiety in a child than does thumb-sucking, but will probably not persist if the child's personal life gives him support and satisfaction. Direct attempts to 'cure' these habits are generally harmful and seldom effective. Even if the symptom is withdrawn, the child may show his difficulties in ways which are really more harmful, such as in the loss of resilience, or in withdrawal and depression. The most

helpful attitude, for both teacher and parent, is to think more about the child's happiness and satisfactions in his life as a whole and not to focus too much attention on the symptom itself. Sometimes steps that are taken to enlarge and enrich the child's experience and so give his imagination a wider scope in which to range and from which to draw ideas for play, are found to be very helpful.

Breakdown in habits believed to have been formed. The most common causes of anxiety to parents are lapses in continence, which may occur especially in the earlier part of the period. Children sometimes revert to bed-wetting when adjusting to the advent of a new baby or under temporary stress of other kinds. New children in Nursery Schools are particularly liable to such difficulties. They may be afraid to use the school lavatories or to pass their motions when helped by an unfamiliar person. Patience, gentleness and a calm cheerfulness when a lapse occurs, are the best ways of helping the child to regain his control.

Display and curiosity. Interest and pride in their own bodies, especially in their genital organs, are very normal in healthy children at this age. In earlier times, when this tendency was not recognised, children often suffered acutely by being severely reprimanded or punished for displaying their own bodies or showing curiosity in other children's. It should be quietly and naturally accepted that such interests will be there, and questions about these matters and about the origin of babies which normally occur at this age should be simply but truthfully answered. If children are inclined to over-stimulate each other they are best helped by the same means as is indicated above, the provision of other interests and the unobtrusive directing of the child's attention to other interesting play, in much of which the healthy and normal tendency, for example, of the little boy to glory in his masculinity or the

little girl to emulate her mother can be sublimated. But the teacher should not be over-anxious to distract the child every time such interests are shown and should recognise that one of the values of the Nursery School is that small boys and girls have a natural opportunity of finding out about and accepting the differences between the sexes, which may not be the case at home if the children in a family are all of one sex or there is a great disparity in age.

Speech difficulties. These are common and there is often a tendency to stammering at about the age of three which passes away as the child gains more perfect control of the words he so urgently needs in order to express his thoughts. Direct attempts to 'cure' speech difficulties may do much more harm than good. Willingness to listen patiently and respond with interest to what the child wants to tell us and to give him new words and modes of expression by our own conversation with him are the best ways of helping him towards clear and articulate speech. Parents should be reassured about a three-year-old stammer. In most cases it passes away and it is too early then to discover the rare cases of children who may need special help, though they may become evident by the end of the Nursery School period.

Destructiveness. Unless they recognise its normality, this tendency naturally distresses parents. Legitimate outlets for this impulse are freely available in a good Nursery School and the child can gradually be taught that some things are precious and must be handled with care, while others may be sawn, broken up and hammered or torn. Sawing, cutting and tearing can often be put to constructive use.

There are, of course, many other problems, but those mentioned above are perhaps the ones which most frequently worry parents.

PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS

It is interesting, however, to note that in a long-term research study carried out at Berkeley College, California,¹ it was found that some problems, which are popularly supposed not to occur until later in the lives of children, are in fact, sometimes mentioned by parents of children under five. Some of them are mentioned particularly when the child is four years old and may indicate the difficulty with which the child is achieving the quite remarkable degree of self-control which is often found at this age. Over-sensitivity, moodiness, excessive modesty, over-activity, obstinacy, irritability and lying belong to this group. Lying, unless it springs from fear, is probably motivated by the child's desire to dissociate himself from behaviour which falls short of the standard to which he is trying to attain. Younger children, of course, at times also express passionate denials, but parents are usually wise enough not to designate this as 'lying', nor to apply this term to the vivid fantasies of small children which they sometimes confuse with fact.

Other problems are probably mentioned more often when the child is four, because parents are not surprised at their incidence at an earlier age, but by the time the child is four, and is on the whole so much more controlled in his behaviour, parents may think that these problems should have been completely outgrown. Examples of this type of problem are: excessive demanding of attention, excessive emotional dependence, showing off, and physical timidity, all of which the parent is inclined to accept as natural in the very young child.

Anxiety about making choices is also very common in children of three to five years old, which is also an age at

¹Jean Walker Macfarlane, *Studies in Child Guidance*, Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development. Vol. III, No. 6, National Research Council, Washington, D.C.

which jealousy is very clearly manifested. It is possible that the difficulty in choosing is a projection of the child's difficulties when facing the problem of his love for one person meaning, to him, the rejection, for the time being, of another. A research worker who was trying to find out the preference of young children for certain pictures over others, was compelled to give up asking the children which they liked best, because so often either the child would refuse to answer or would assert, 'I like them both best'.

Jealousy is often well-controlled by four years old, which explains why, when it is shown then, parents are liable to report it. This problem has already been discussed and is very characteristic of the whole period between two and five. It is a happier situation for children, now that most parents are aware of the problem, than it was for them in the days when parents sometimes stated categorically that their children were never jealous—sensitivity to the child's feelings enables the parents to avoid giving unnecessary pain.

The apparent increase in many of the problems, as reported by parents, when their children are four or four and a half, probably indicates that there is a tendency to expect rather too much of the four-year-old. In the Nursery School, however, they are usually found to be much more stable and easier to handle than are the three-year-olds, and their enjoyment of practical responsibilities and the status of being the oldest children enables them to behave sensibly in the Nursery School.

It may be the case that, having exerted great self-control at school, the child needs at times to revert to more babyish behaviour at home, as is also often the case with children of five or six. It is important that teachers should not increase the parents' worries by reporting complacently about how well the child behaves at school without pointing

out that, for this very reason, he may need at times to relax his self-control with those with whom he feels most secure—his own parents.

The parent also has the right to know that the child's good behaviour at school is due in great measure to the stability given to him by his home. Unless parents realise this, they are sometimes inclined to become depressed and believe that the Nursery School teacher manages the children so much better than they do.

A great value of the Nursery School is that it provides a common meeting-ground for parents of young children, where they can often learn much about normal children from watching them and exchanging ideas with other parents and with the teacher. Any help which serves to relieve a parent's anxiety will also act favourably on the child. In the early days of Nursery School education, the chief purpose of a parents' meeting was, frankly, that of educating the parent. Since Nursery Schools were often in very poor areas, parents often were, in fact, in need of considerable practical help and information of a kind which was known and published in books which they had no money to buy nor time to read. The busy and often harassed mother sometimes acted on old wives' fables or on advice passed on from her own mother or other relatives. Over-clothing, unsuitable food, lack of fresh air and alternate indulgence and irritability or severity were common problems with which young children had to struggle, and it was natural that Nursery School teachers should give more thought to the question of educating parents than to the equally important matter of letting parents educate them. Parents were sometimes docile, sometimes rebellious, but on the whole inclined to give in because of their gratitude for all that the Nursery School had to offer and the kindness of the teachers to their children. It is doubtful,

however, whether some of the deeper problems were relieved as well as they are today when with the more widespread knowledge of child care and improved physical conditions in many of the homes, teachers and parents alike, have time to consider other problems.

The teaching of psychology in the Training Colleges now gives the Nursery School teacher much more knowledge about the psychological characteristics and needs of children than she previously possessed.

The war, too, with its distressing effect of separating so many young children from their parents, caused the sensitive teacher to become much more vividly aware of how much the success of her work had really depended on the fact that the child she met in the daytime had a home from which he came and to which he returned. The acute problems of young children without their parents, and the amazingly different picture when conditions were normal again, gave teachers a deeper respect for what the parent had done, even if the home had been in a slum. Co-operation between teachers and parents has become much more reciprocal. The teacher is often aware that the clue which will help her to understand much about a child may be given by the parent, and that the best way of helping the child may well be to listen sympathetically to the parent, thereby both gaining insight and giving relief. The teacher can never know as much about any one child as a sympathetic parent can do, but she can contribute a great deal from her greater practical knowledge of many different children and from her theoretical understanding, if it is sound and well assimilated. Parents, for example, may be worried because their second child behaves so differently from the first, and here a teacher's knowledge of the very different behaviour and personality of different children may give some relief.

PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS

We see, then, that the sympathy so necessary to the mental health of young children will be even more effective and helpful if it extends to the parents and helps them to a greater understanding of matters which may puzzle and distress them about their children. The best help we can give to a difficult child is to help his parents to be able to accept him more warmly and sympathetically. Most of these difficult children are the product of difficulties and anxieties in their homes and some of these are beyond our power to help, but there is no doubt that in many cases the Nursery School teacher, with her common bond with the parents, with whom she shares the care of their children, is in a very favourable position to be the recipient of confidences and, if sympathetic, may be able to give much relief and help.

Parents are sometimes glad to know of suitable books on children's problems. The chapter on 'Some Problems and Crises of early Social Development', in Susan Isaacs' *Social Development in Young Children*, would be helpful to such parents, as would also be her chapter on 'Rebellious and Defiant Children', published, among other essays and clinical studies, in her last book, *Childhood and After*. These books would not, however, be suitable in their entirety, to any but very knowledgeable parents, and would probably be of most help to the teacher.

Ruth Thomas' pamphlets, listed in the bibliography, would be more suitable to average parents.

Two books which would appeal both to teachers and parents, are: *Parents' Questions*, edited by Sidone M. Gruenberg, and, *Troubles of Children and Parents*, by Susan Isaacs.

There are many simple books on child care and management, now available, from which the teacher will make her own choice for the parents' library.

6

Preparation for Nursery School Teaching



The far-reaching nature of recent developments in early education means that we have to look again at the preparation which we offer to the teacher. Education is more and more based upon using the natural purposes and interests of children to lead them on to valuable knowledge and achievement and, more important still, to foster their loving and creative attitude and to establish the confidence which will enable them to tackle difficulties and exercise mental energy and self control. This type of education demands far more of the teacher than was the case when a teacher's work was thought of as largely consisting of presenting and instilling into the minds of children certain agreed pieces of information and training the children in specific habits and skills, in ways which were often clearly prescribed.

It has always been recognised that the personality of the teacher is of great importance, but in earlier days, this statement would have been taken to imply mainly the need for the teacher of infants to be kindly and of good character, with powers of leadership and resourcefulness in devising means for making the knowledge she was required to impart as palatable as possible to the young mind, so that its chances of being retained would be greater.

Modern methods require all this, but much more as well. Above all, they demand that the teacher should have a

sensitive insight into the minds of children, that she shall be swift to appreciate and sympathise with their purposes, to understand their anxieties and those of their parents, and intelligent enough to perceive and take up in the right way the many opportunities which are there to be used for the child's happiness, welfare and intellectual progress. The art of informal teaching is much more subtle and requires a greater imaginative sensitivity than does the art of purely formal teaching, but it also includes the need for all that was best in the art of the formal teacher. There are occasions when even young children require the shapely and methodical presentation of new knowledge, when they are eager to understand something, and clear directions will help them to acquire the skill for which they are seeking, at the moment when they are in danger of becoming disheartened because their own experiments have failed. More often still, the teacher needs to know when the brief word of comment or encouragement, the leading question, the tactful intervention, the direction of the child's attention to a fresh possibility, will give the stimulus and support necessary to lead him on to fresh achievement and satisfaction. She also needs to know when to withhold her desire to help in order not to prevent the child from making his own discovery and solving his own problem, or lest she should dull his awakening interest by imposing a purpose of her own which is out of line with his ability or present need. A good teacher is active and alert and has vitality and a sense of fun. She needs to feel that life is full of interests and possibilities, yet she also needs to be peaceful and serene and able to appreciate and sympathise with sorrow as well as joy. She has, at times, to be able to meet the imperious needs of many young children for a relationship, not far removed from that which they have, or wish to have, with their own parents, which means that

she has to be able to tolerate hostility as well as to give love and respond adequately to the child's love for her. And yet she must not become so identified in a relationship with one child that she loses sight of the others.

All this implies that she herself needs personal enrichment, as well as technical skill and professional knowledge.

Among the many purposes and interests of children, it is not possible for her to give time and attention to encouraging the development of everything to its optimal degree, and she needs to think out clearly what are the aims and values which she is seeking to further in the education of young children. This will help her to select wisely where she will put her main attention day by day. But she must keep an open-minded attitude if she finds a child is very eager to pursue an activity in which she does not at first see any potential value. It may be that, although no particular knowledge or skill is going to be acquired, the child is finding an emotional satisfaction and release in the activity which is to him a symbol of something which he needs to express. She must be able to be a wise and patient observer and not withdraw attention or attempt to interfere if the child is really seeking the experience, unless he is in danger of harming himself or others. Fortunately it is not required of her that she should always understand in full what the child's deeper purpose may be, but she must be able to understand that it is important to him and be able to respect his need. It is important that she should be able to appreciate how wide a term is 'education' and not swing either to the extreme of caring only for intellectual achievement and the acquisition of knowledge and skill, or of forgetting that these matters are of importance, both to the child's emotional life and also in their own right.

Some young teachers today, rightly aware that emotional

attitudes, personality and character are more important than the acquisition of specific knowledge, are inclined to forget this. In the past the teacher was more inclined to forget the child's feelings and think too exclusively in terms of his learning.

Much more could be added to this attempt to sketch some of the requirements of the truly successful teacher in the modern Nursery or Infant School. But I fear I have already said enough to merit the criticism, that in asking for this degree of maturity, an impossible standard is set for the young teacher. We shall, of course, all make mistakes and fall short of the aim of meeting the needs of all children all the time. It is true too that children can carry on happily and usefully for long spells of time without the need of special attention—indeed too much attention would not be good for them, but in our over-large classes, the giving of too much attention is less of a danger than is that of ignoring the child who has a real need of us, at the time when the need is there. It is valuable, however, to teach students specifically the truth that the child is always aware of our attitude towards him and a total relationship with him will not be spoilt by some mistakes, if they are not too many and do not last too long. At the age at which most students are in College, there is often a great sensitivity to mistakes and a tendency to worry over-much, and while it is helpful to encourage students to think constructively how to improve their teaching, they should not be subjected to negative criticism, nor overwhelmed by too much emphasis on the requirements of their profession. They will meet them better if they enjoy their work and act, on the whole, spontaneously.

My purpose in considering the demands of the profession upon the teacher is rather to give a background against which we can review the question of appropriate

training. This is, of course, a vast subject and I shall do no more than mention a few matters which seem to be particularly vital to the training of teachers who intend to work with young children. Many of them are, of course, equally important to all teachers.

The responsibility of training is not confined solely to the Training College. Perhaps the most important part of a teacher's training is that which she receives from the experienced teachers in whose schools she undertakes her practical work. That is why I feel I need make no apology for introducing this question in a book which is addressed mainly to teachers in the schools.

If we are trying to fit the education of children to the psychological needs of children, perhaps we should do well to think of fitting the training of teachers more closely to the psychological needs of young people in the post-adolescent period, which is the age at which most of them enter College. Most of them come straight from their Secondary Schools and are often diffident about their ability to teach. They have often had little, if any, previous experience with young children. Their greatest need is to get to know children before they are required to deal with large numbers of them at once, and for this purpose a Nursery School may be very favourable. When dealing with individuals or small groups it is easier for an inexperienced student to see where her help is needed and can be most profitably given, to note when her well-meant attempts have failed and to think out how best to proceed the next time such an occasion arises. Unobtrusive help in these matters from an experienced teacher may be greatly valued. Students are happy who find themselves welcomed by friendly teachers who can appreciate their difficulties and yet understand what they are trying to do and help them to succeed. It is, of course, very depressing

to a student to feel that her presence is only patiently endured, and, worse still, to be with a teacher who drops hints that when the student has finished her practice the teacher will be able to put things right again. Sometimes, perhaps because she is not handling too many children, a student develops a warm relationship with a difficult child, and a wise teacher will welcome this additional opportunity for the child, even if, as one teacher put it, 'The student may announce her triumph with more joy than tact'. The desire to help and the pleasure in having helped, are qualities which no sensitive teacher can do other than rejoice in, when thinking about the career of a young recruit to her own profession. The teacher who gradually hands over more responsibility as the student becomes able to take it, and who unobtrusively uses her own influence with the children to lead them to accept the newcomer, is doing quite as much to help to train the student as the College can do. A good college will be a place of liberal education for its students and will expand their interests in many studies and give them experience in many creative arts. At the heart of its curriculum, however, is the study of education and of children, and of greatest importance among its arts is the art of teaching. In these studies the practising teachers in the schools have a vital part to play.

The study of education, its aims and principles, may remain divorced from real life in the students' minds unless the teachers whom she meets in the schools will let her understand their own aims and the principles on which their work is based. The study of psychology, with its greater emphasis on child development, is immeasurably enriched if the teachers will point out and help the students to observe the characteristic behaviour of children in a variety of real situations and, above all, if the teachers will

help the students to become friends of the children. The art of teaching young children is more likely to be caught than taught, and the teacher who will give time and trouble, not only to letting the student see her at work but to discussing such matters as the reason why she has followed one procedure rather than another, where she has made a mistake and how it can be remedied, may give more help than could be given in a score of method lectures. The student who feels the happiness of her own growing usefulness in the schools in which she practises is well on her way to becoming a teacher. The encouragement and constructive advice of teachers who really know their children can often rescue her from despair. In schools for older children, it is sometimes helpful for teachers to withdraw a good deal, and students often find their feet better when this is done, but in a Nursery School the teacher cannot withdraw suddenly without upsetting the children fundamentally and thus making a very difficult situation for the student also. A gradual handing over of responsibility, as the student becomes known and trusted by the children, is the only satisfactory way to train a Nursery School teacher. While all teachers undoubtedly exercise much influence on the students who practise in their schools, the Nursery School teacher probably has the most fundamental influence, because the work must necessarily be carried on so much in partnership.

It is no less necessary at this stage than at any other for the teacher to be open-minded and willing to allow experiments to be tried, and to recognise that even a young student may have different gifts and abilities from her own and that there is no one best way of teaching, for all teachers, but it is her own support and respect for the student's personality which enables the children to work with a new teacher in an atmosphere of security, without

the conflict of loyalties which always produces so much anxiety and distress.

I should like here to pay a heartfelt tribute of gratitude to the very many teachers to whose generosity and kindness the students whom I have known have owed so much. Every college supervisor must be able to recall many occasions on which the wisdom and insight of the head or class teacher have been the greatest support to her work.

Students too, are very ready to return generous service to the schools and are often delighted if asked to help with out-of-school activities, such as evening play centres, school holidays and outings. The intimate contact with children, which they thus gain is often of inestimable value. Students have many times remarked to me that they learnt more about children by going away for a fortnight's holiday with a Nursery School group than from all their periods of teaching practice. Other students have expressed appreciation of the opportunity to know certain children over a long period of time, which is available to those who give continuous help in a play centre, even if only for an hour or so, each week.

The Influence of the Nursery School upon the Infant School



There is no doubt that, since Nursery Schools began to win approval and interest, thoughtful educationalists quickly became aware that the conditions found to be so helpful for children under five could also make a vital contribution to the welfare and education of children over five. At first it was the physical amenities of the Nursery School which claimed most attention. New Infant School buildings began to bear a resemblance to the open-air type of structure so much advocated by Margaret MacMillan. Direct access from every classroom to the playground was planned and gardens were often provided. Light and easily moveable furniture had already found its way into many Infant Schools and even in older buildings adaptations were often made to bring them nearer to the standards of Nursery Schools. Long before school dinners were established on a national scale the best Infant Schools were making provision for pleasantly served mid-morning lunch, suitable accommodation for toilet, and for an afternoon rest.

In the methods of teaching, too, a greater flexibility became evident and much more freedom was given to the children to move about, change their apparatus and help in the care of the classroom. Book corners, nature corners

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NURSERY SCHOOL

and pets began to appear in Infant Schools, and sand and water, clay, paints, and materials for constructive work and dramatic play, become common. Though for a long time the Three Rs loomed over-large in the programme, even of the five-year-old children, the simultaneous instruction of whole classes was gradually discarded in favour of group and individual work, so that children could progress each at his appropriate pace.

Of late years, we have seen an increasing number of schools in which the daily programme is very much like that of a Nursery School, though the activities and interests are longer sustained and extend into wider fields which often involve the skills of reading, writing and calculating. In many schools, however, the children, especially below the age of six, are free to choose among the activities provided, to use materials for their own purposes and to postpone the approach to reading until their interest is genuinely aroused. The rôle of the teacher in sustaining or furthering the children's interests and thus leading them on to fresh discoveries and the acquisition of greater skill is not fundamentally different from that of a Nursery School teacher. The greater independence of the children, however, means that she has less frequently to give physical care, their greater sociability relieves her of so much of the necessity to arbitrate and protect, and their stricter standards of reality and more conscious desire for being taught will lead her to spend more time in imparting information, demonstrating skill or making constructive suggestions for achieving a result which will satisfy a more critical little worker.

It is the common practice in Training Colleges now to train Nursery School teachers for Infant School work as well, and although there are not nearly such a large number of colleges which train students for Nursery School

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

work as there are for Infant Schools, almost all the colleges which train students only as teachers of children over five see to it that the intending Infant School teachers learn a great deal about the needs of children under five and, if possible, spend part of their teaching practice periods in a Nursery Class or School.

It is interesting to remember that there was once a time when Nursery School teachers, including Margaret MacMillan herself, were very unwilling to support the idea of Nursery classes in Infant Schools. In those days there was a real danger that instead of the standards of the Nursery School being incorporated into the Infant School, the then formal teaching of the Infant School and the relative indifference of many Infant School teachers to the physical needs of the children, might have lowered the standards of the Nursery Class. When children under five were admitted to Infant Schools, the more enlightened administrative officers often insisted that the name 'Nursery Class' should not be used unless conditions reached certain specified standards. One such Authority in 1936, for example, laid down that these standards included:

- (1) a separate entrance, cloakroom and outdoor playing space,
- (2) a mid-day meal, cooked on the premises,
- (3) daily physical inspection by a nurse,
- (4) a Nursery School trained teacher in charge of the class.

Anxiety of Nursery School teachers about Nursery Classes has very much diminished now, because, particularly on the educational side, the principles of the Nursery School are so firmly established and also because Infant Schools themselves are, in increasing numbers, so much more like Nursery Schools than they were, and their

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NURSERY SCHOOL

teachers have learnt so much more in their training about the needs of the younger children and are more informal in their methods. We have almost arrived at the concept of the first stage in education as stretching from the Nursery stage up to the age of seven plus, whether or not the children are in separate schools. It is now no more than a historic memory among older teachers that there was once rivalry and criticism between Nursery and Infant School teachers and it is becoming rare for Infant School teachers to express dislike of the liveliness and initiative of children who have been through a Nursery School and to prefer the children who may be overawed by the first impact of school when entering straight from home.

It would, of course, be an over-statement to claim that the whole of the remarkable development of the Infant School was due to the influence of the Nursery School, though that is probably the strongest single influence. Infant School teachers have included many pioneers who have been sensitive and quick to appreciate and give consideration to fresh ideas. There was a time when certain Infant Schools had progressed further in appreciating the value and educational possibilities of children's spontaneous play than was sometimes the case in Nursery Schools of that period, whose teachers, preoccupied with the very real struggle to win facilities for the child's physical care, were inclined to rely overmuch on didactic apparatus and give less attention to what the child could be learning from spontaneous play. In those days the Nursery School programme included so many breaks, for speech training, toilet training, occupations, rhythmic work, etc., that the time allowed for free play was often very short. An article on Nursery Schools, published in about 1936-37, gave a specimen programme for a good Nursery School which allowed only half an hour for free play and was unchallenged

at the time, until Susan Isaacs and Sir Percy Nunn protested about it in a letter to *The Times*. At this period, the more progressive Infant Schools, though few perhaps in number, were giving much more time to play, despite the very severe handicaps imposed on them by their unsuitable buildings, slender allowances for equipment and very large classes. Nursery School teachers, however, were quick to turn to a more flexible and less formal programme, as the fuller knowledge and understanding of the value of play spread more widely, and they had never been nearly as formal as the traditional Infant Schools had been. The drawing together of Nursery and Infant School teachers has undoubtedly led to great progress, and there is real hope now that before very long, at least as far as the education of children under eight is concerned, few children will have to suffer the sharp and sudden change in their education which is such a setback to intellectual progress and often to mental health and happiness.

Among the many books which reflect the continuity in method between Nursery and Infant School education, I will mention two recent English books, E. R. Boyce, *The First Year in School*, and Simpson and Alderson, *Creative Play in the Infant School*. Such books give great encouragement to Nursery School teachers, who in the past were sometimes distressed by the thought that the teachers, who would receive the children from them, might have a totally different conception of education.

The Future of Nursery Schools



At the time of writing, the position in regard to the provision of Nursery Schools is rather depressing, though less so than it was a year or two ago. The tendency of some Local Education Authorities to close their Nursery Schools as a measure of economy, has been arrested and a few new ones are gradually being opened. The Ministry of Education's circular which banned the opening of new Nursery Schools has been withdrawn, though the present shortage of teachers for children of statutory school age makes it unlikely that there will be a rapid expansion in the very near future. Moreover, the other educational aims of raising the compulsory school age to sixteen, providing County Colleges and reducing the size of Primary School classes, important as they all are, constitute a further threat to the making of adequate provision for the foundation stage of education. At present only about 3 children in every 100 find their way into Nursery Schools or classes.

More hopeful signs are, however, present. The very large number of children now passing out of the Infant Schools have caused further accommodation to be provided, which may in time be available for Nursery classes.

More important still is the growing recognition all over the world of how much these early years of childhood really matter and how valuable a Nursery School can be to

children and parents. Highly educated parents, and those from good working-class homes where mothers do not go out to work, are now wanting to send their children to Nursery Schools, for their educational value and, even in the most distressed areas, there are clear indications that the Nursery School is valued for many reasons above and beyond the very real need of the mother for relief. In cases of acute need, the Nursery School which is open for the full day is an obvious necessity, but we are now asking ourselves whether the needs of children from all areas are the same. The earliest Nursery Schools in Great Britain were provided in areas where poverty was great and mothers had to go out to work, where housing conditions were very bad and mothers, often suffering from ill-health, physically or mentally, were unfitted for the daytime care of their children.

There is no doubt that for many years to come we shall need many more full-time Nursery Schools than we have at present, and to convert such schools into half-time ones would be to shut our eyes to the need. Even in such schools, however, the Superintendent should be allowed, at her own discretion, to admit certain children for a half instead of a whole day. For younger children especially, the whole day may be too long at first, and not only the teacher but the mother, too, may think it wiser to begin more gradually. Unless staffing is very generous it is too much strain on the teachers to have many children coming fresh to the Nursery School in the afternoon, when they are responsible for full day provision. If, however, a Superintendent feels able to admit even a few such children, there is no doubt that some children benefit. Attendance, even on one day a week, has often been a real help to some children and, not long ago, I have found cases of mothers paying fees which they could ill afford to get children into a dancing class, once a

week, in order to give them a chance to 'run about with other children'.

In some areas, where the home background is suitable, the half-day Nursery School has a real part to play, and many wise and thoughtful parents who are very eager to send the children for a half-day are unwilling to send them for longer and are quite prepared to give the midday meal at home and provide for the child's midday rest, either before or after the meal. In such cases there seems a place for Nursery Schools which one group of children attends in the morning and another in the afternoon. The teachers, not having to cope with the Nursery School dinner, can get a break and rest after their own meal and so be ready to welcome the afternoon group of children. Such provision, of course, enables one school to serve the needs of more children and parents. It is not much use to the mother who must go out to work, but a great help to one who is doing her best to keep a happy home together but may be over-pressed and have little space to offer the child for lively and vigorous play, and also to the mother whose home has good amenities but no easy access to other young children.

One Superintendent in quite a poor area found that 60 per cent. of the mothers actually preferred the half day to the whole. This type of provision has long been available to children of pre-school age in some countries, but has not, till recently, been offered in Britain, except in private schools where parents pay fees.

Some Nursery School teachers are reluctant to support the idea of experiment in different types of Nursery School provision, fearing that the full value of the Nursery School may be lost. It is well to remember that the half-day Nursery School can preserve many of the advantages, especially:

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

- (1) educational activities and play with other children in the open air;
- (2) supplements to the normal diet, extra milk, fruit juice and cod liver oil; the mid-morning or afternoon snack can consist of extra vitamins or protein in sandwiches, perhaps;
- (3) medical inspection, vital in these early years when the detection and treatment of early signs of illness are so rewarding;
- (4) help and advice to parents.

It is, of course, important to watch to see whether the absence of the midday meal in school and the afternoon rest is detrimental; if this seems to be so, much can be done by advice to the parents. This type of Nursery School is, however, particularly suited to help the good home.

There may well be room for other types of experimental provision—children in country areas, who may have to travel some distance, may benefit more from the type of provision often offered in Australia and New Zealand, where Nursery Schools are available on certain days in the week for certain children and where mothers act as assistants to the teacher.

We should be open-minded about trying experiments of fitting Nursery School provision to various needs. The large blocks of flats, for example, now frequently erected in new housing areas, create a different type of problem for parents and children, to which the best solution may well be a Nursery School within the precincts of the flats.

We should assess carefully all such experiments from the point of view of their effect on the child, and this is inseparable from the effect on teachers and parents, who exercise a vital influence upon the children. Some types of provision may call for more generous staffing. One

example of this would certainly be Nursery Schools which cater for approximately equal numbers of full-time and part-time children. If we are satisfied that the children are fully benefiting, the result of these experiments may be that we shall have more Nursery School provision and, in some cases, at a reduced cost per child, but we must avoid what has sometimes been a tendency in the past, to act merely from motives of expediency and then seek for psychological reasons to justify it.

Experiment, undertaken in the sincere belief that we could do better for children than we are doing now, is always healthy if we are prepared to watch the effects open-mindedly and discard what is found to be failing to achieve its purpose. Moreover, we should remember that there is no one orthodox or 'best' type of procedure equally applicable to all conditions. In some Nursery Schools one type of procedure may be better for the children than what is found to be better elsewhere. Teachers, too, have varying gifts and can make their individual contributions more richly if allowed to use them in ways which come naturally to them. But teachers should be willing to visit and study the ways of other teachers also. Individual children, or groups of children, also may need different treatment from what suits most children. Nursery School teachers should not be afraid to use flexible methods, suited to their particular circumstances and the needs of their particular children. No country gives greater freedom to the teacher than our own and Nursery Schools, the youngest part of the educational service, must be worthy of their heritage and show courage and open-mindedness.

A great expansion, which seems well on its way, is the service which the Nursery School can render to parents. Already, as I have pointed out, co-operation is on a higher level than ever before. Parents are becoming very

conscious of their psychological significance to their children. The press, especially the women's journals, the radio, theatre and cinema, are all issuing psychological propaganda and parents are demanding help. Some people would like to protect parents from so much exposure to psychological doctrines; the ideas to which they are exposed certainly differ in value and much good advice is misunderstood because it is not in context with the parents' own problems. It is not possible, however much we may desire it, to prevent people from knowing what is available; the only antidote to bad teaching is good and sound teaching. The greatest danger is that parents may lose faith in themselves, as parents, and the Nursery School which enlists their co-operation may be a very good antidote. It is important that when we render services to parents we should not imply that we think that they are inadequate. For example, it is an insult to good parents to tell them that the school meal is necessary to give the child 'good social training', but very helpful when we point out that a young child, who may eat better at school than at home, is passing through a difficulty which is very normal in young children, who can show their difficulty more easily with the person who really means most to them.

The Nursery School has an honourable tradition of co-operation with parents, but we should constantly ask ourselves whether we could use the help of parents even more than we do now.

Another interesting development is the steadily increasing recognition by clinical psychologists and those working in this field of Child Guidance, of the value of the Nursery School and indeed of the help which can be afforded, too, by schools for older children which use methods suited to the child's psychological needs. The mutual support and co-operation between teachers and

clinical psychologists and the increasing number of appointments of psychologists to the Education Authorities' staffs, are bringing teachers and psychologists nearer together. This should do much to promote the mental health and happiness of children.

BOOKS RECOMMENDED IN THE TEXT



Boyce, H. R.	<i>The First Year in School</i>	1953	Nisbet
Chaloner, L.	<i>Questions Children Ask</i>	1952	Faber & Faber
Griffiths, R.	<i>A Study of Imagination in Early Childhood</i>	1949	repr. Kegan Paul
Hartley, R. E., Frank, L. K. and Goldenson, R. M.	<i>Understanding Children's Play</i>	1952	Routledge
Gruenberg, S. M. (ed.)	<i>Parents' Questions</i>	1947	Harper Bros.
Isaacs, S.	<i>Childhood and After</i>	1948	Routledge
„	<i>Intellectual Growth in Young Children</i>	1930	Routledge
„	<i>Social Development in Young Children</i>	1935	Routledge
„	<i>Troubles of Children and Parents</i>	1948	Methuen
Simpson and Alderson	<i>Creative Play in the Infant School</i>	1950	Pitman

A short list of other books published or reprinted since 1945 which are of special interest to Nursery School teachers

Chesters, G.	<i>Mothering of Young Children</i>	1948	repr. Faber & Faber
Davidson, A. and Fay, J.	<i>Phantasy in Childhood</i>	1952	Routledge
Gardner, D. E. M.	<i>Education Under Eight</i>	1948	Longmans
Gesell, A.	<i>The First Five Years of Life</i>	1950	revd. Methuen
Harris, E. K.	<i>The Responsiveness of Kindergarten Children to the Behaviour of their Fellows</i>	1948	Mono. Society for Research in Child Development
Isaacs, S.	<i>The Nursery Years</i>	1953	Routledge repr.
Jersild, A. T.	<i>Child Development and the Curriculum</i>	1950	Teachers Coll., repr. Columbia Univ.

BOOKS RECOMMENDED

Jersild, A. T. and others	<i>Joys and Problems of Child Rearing</i>	1949	Teachers Coll., Columbia Univ.
Lawrence, E. (ed.)	<i>Friedrich Froebel and English Education</i>	1952	U.L.P.
de Lissa, L.	<i>Life in the Nursery School</i>	1949	
		repr.	Longmans
N.U.T. Committee	<i>Nursery-Infant Education</i>	1949	Evans
Piaget, J.	<i>The Child's Conception of Number</i>	1952	Routledge
„	<i>Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood</i>	1951	Heinemann
Read, Katherine H.	<i>The Nursery School</i>	1952	Saunders, U.S.A.
		repr.	
Rudolf, Marguerita	<i>Living and Learning in the Nursery School</i>	1954	Harper Bros., U.S.A.
Sheehy, E. D.	<i>There's Music in Children</i>	1952	Henry Holt & Co., New York
Tudor-Hart, B.	<i>Plays and Toys in Nursery Years</i>	1945	Routledge
		repr.	
White, D.	<i>Books Before Five</i>	1954	New Zealand Council for Research (O.U.P.)

PAMPHLETS

Chesters, G.	<i>Our Responsibility to Children</i>	1949	Nursery School Association
Grove, B. I.	<i>The Nursery School in Action</i>	1950	„
Isaacs, S.	<i>The Educational Value of the Nursery School</i>	1937	„
de Lissa, L.	<i>Education up to Seven plus</i>	1945	„
N.S.A. Medical Advisory Comm.	<i>Health and the Nursery School</i>	1949	„
Stone, H.	<i>Play Materials for Children under Eight</i>	1953	Nat. Froebel Foundation
Thomas, R.	<i>Children's Fears</i>	1947	Nat. Assoc. for
		repr.	Mental Health

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Thomas, R.	<i>Children who Dislike their Food</i>	1947	Nat. Assoc. for repr. Mental Health
„	<i>Fears and Jealousies</i>	1947 repr.	„
„	<i>Further Trying Habits</i>	1947 repr.	„
„	<i>Habit Training</i>	1947 repr.	„
„	<i>Temper Tantrums</i>	1947 repr.	„

APPENDIX

The Need for Nursery Schools



The material in this appendix is contributed by my colleague, Miss Joan E. Cass, and is the outcome of work under her direction of five trained experienced Nursery School teachers who, during an advanced course in the Department of Child Development at the University of London Institute of Education, made a survey of the waiting lists of eight Nursery Schools.

These teachers, to whom Miss Cass and I wish to express our thanks are Miss Dora M. Knowles, Miss Jeanne E. Southall, Miss Hannah Boydell, Mrs. Docherty and Miss Mary Bradbury.

D. E. M. GARDNER

In considering the need for Nursery Schools in the present shortage of accommodation one is always, when visiting a Nursery School, struck by the enormous length of its waiting list. It is the custom of Heads of Nursery Schools to put down the child's name and then to inform the parent as soon as there is a vacancy for the child. The problem of the length of these waiting lists has concerned many members of the Department of Child Development for some time and it was decided to examine every case on the waiting lists of a group of representative Nursery Schools. It was felt that it would be interesting to discover, for example, the reasons parents gave for wishing to send their children to a Nursery School and whether they were aware of its educational value. Such an investigation also provided the opportunity to meet and talk with mothers who had young children and to see something of the conditions

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

under which they were living and the difficulties they were facing.

When discussing the waiting lists with the different head teachers, it was found that most of them had reached a stage when they felt it was not right to put down a child's name, since this implied that they would eventually be able to take him when, in fact, there was little hope of his ever being admitted. Most of them had therefore closed their waiting lists. The eight Nursery Schools whose waiting lists were examined served a variety of different types of area and need. Nursery schools 'A' and 'B' represented a very good cross-section of the community; both were in areas which superficially appeared good until they were carefully visited, when the living conditions were often found to be very bad. Nursery School 'A' had a certain proportion of children from professional families.

Nursery School 'C' was in the industrial north, situated in a dreary smoke-blackened spot, serving families where the tradition was for both parents to work.

Nursery School 'D' served both a badly bomb-damaged slum area, and a more pleasant residential middle class area.

Nursery School 'E' was in a dock area by a river, busy with traffic and the unloading of barges. It was similar in some ways to Nursery School 'D', as living conditions varied from slum property to pleasant houses with gardens.

Nursery School 'F' was in the suburban area of a small town, where there was a good deal of overcrowding.

Nursery School 'G' was in a small attractive village with good living conditions and parents mainly in good circumstances.

Nursery School 'H' served a predominantly working class area.

The total number on the waiting lists of these 8 Nursery Schools was 890 children. The actual number of case histories obtained was 438.

As will be seen from the accounts of these 8 Nursery Schools, some families had moved, made other arrangements for their children, or the children were either going, or about to go to School.

It was decided that every family on the waiting lists of these 8 Nursery Schools should be visited in as informal a way as possible.

It was thought that there might be some resentment felt by these parents who had been waiting so long, and it was not intended to raise their hopes in any way that their children would very shortly be admitted to the Nursery School.

The interviewer, therefore, called without warning, and was in the great majority of cases received in a most friendly way, few mothers showing annoyance. Some visits were made during the day, others in the evening.

The interviewer explained that she had called to see whether they still wished their child's name to remain on the waiting list. She inquired in a friendly way about the child and gradually led on to the specific questions she wanted to ask. Mothers seemed pleased to talk and to feel that they had not been forgotten. Visits varied in length from 5 minutes to nearly an hour and many of the mothers invited the interviewer into their houses. Most of the mothers gave a variety of reasons for wishing to get their children into the Nursery Schools. The reasons most often given were:

- Space for play
- Companionship
- Economic and health conditions
- Bad housing and personal difficulties in the home.

Description of the Schools

NURSERY SCHOOL 'A'

(Accommodation 80 children)

There was a waiting list of 240 children. Of these 105 were now too old to be admitted, while 16 families and their children had left the district. There were 7 mothers who had made other arrangements and no longer wished to send their

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

children to the Nursery School. This left a waiting list of 106 children.

Housing Conditions. There were 104 families living in flats, most of them built before 1914. Many of these flats were on the top floors of old houses and the stairs were generally unlighted and in a state of decay. Hot and cold water was laid on in 73 flats, 21 had only cold water and 12 had none at all. Some tenants had one tap on each floor for 6 flats, but many mothers had to carry every drop of water up 3 or 4 flights of stairs.

Only 47 families had baths in their flats, while 20 shared bathrooms with other families in the buildings. This was generally very unsatisfactory as the bathrooms were only open at certain hours for a limited number of times a week. Occasionally the only bathroom in the building was in the landlady's kitchen and again this could only be used at certain times. Thirty-nine families had no bathroom in the buildings at all.

There were 70 families which had their own toilets while 30 families had to share toilet accommodation which was often in the basement, most inconvenient for the families on the top floor.

There were 6 families, living in huge old fashioned tenements, which had no toilets in the buildings. Their toilets were in separate blocks in the yard. One family of 4 children had the toilets less than 10 feet from their window almost completely shutting out the light. There were two families living in houses.

Occupations of the Parents. Doctors, civil servants, and business men, policemen, carpenters, lorry drivers and unskilled workers. There were 22 mothers working, 15 of them in part-time work. In 3 families the fathers were University students living on educational grants. There were two mothers who were separated from their husbands and they were receiving an allowance to aid their own earnings.

NURSERY SCHOOL 'B'

(Accommodation 50 children)

There was a waiting list of 195 children. Of these children 42 were now too old to be admitted. There were 37 children who

had left the district and 18 children were just about to start school. Twenty-one mothers felt that the emergency which had prompted them to apply for a place no longer existed. This still left a waiting list of 77 children.

Housing Conditions. Out of the 71 families (77 children) 53 of them were living in large 3-4 storeyed terrace houses, often with basements which had been converted into a number of smaller flats. The condition of these flats varied according to the landlords. In all but 9 cases there was no provision for a bathroom, and the only toilet was a communal one on the ground floor, and was used by all the tenants in the house. In some houses too it was situated in a small out-house outside the main building. The better landlords had provided some sort of small sink and tap between each floor, but in a large number of flats the water had to be fetched and carried from the ground floor by the tenants.

In this type of house the use of the garden was a problem. It belonged to the tenant in the ground floor flat, presumably because the only means of getting out to it was through a door on the ground floor. The result was that the other tenants were only allowed to use it one day a week to hang out their washing. Quite often the landlord himself lived on the ground floor and only in very exceptional circumstances were the children allowed to use the garden.

There were 11 families who owned or rented their own houses, one of these being a prefabricated one. These families often lived in the main part of the house themselves and sub-let 2 or 3 of the top rooms.

Another 5 families lived in fairly modern council flats with reasonable rents but with little provision for children's play. There were two families who lived in privately owned flats, one over a block of shops and the other over a bank.

Occupations of the Parents. A Technical College lecturer, a bank clerk and several engineers, hairdressers, bakers, lorry drivers, hospital porters, bus conductors, painters, dustmen and manual labourers.

In 20 of the families the mothers worked as well, 8 of them

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

had only part time jobs, consisting of such things as domestic cleaning in private homes or local hospitals. The mothers engaged in full-time jobs were employed in either offices, factories, or as shop assistants.

There were 5 broken homes. In only one case was the mother a widow and therefore the sole wage earner. There were 3 mothers who were separated from their husbands and receiving allowances, and one mother had been deserted by her husband.

NURSERY SCHOOL 'C'

(Accommodation 40 children)

There was a waiting list of 77 children. Of these children 9 were too old to be admitted, while 6 families had either left the district or no longer wished their children's names to remain on the waiting list, having made other arrangements for them.

This left a waiting list of 62 children. This was a new and very recently opened Nursery School built specially for mothers wishing to go out to work and so its waiting list had not had very long to accumulate.

Housing Conditions. The general picture was one of smoke blackened cottages in long rows lining unattractive streets and 32 families lived in this type of house. There was an outside toilet and the door at the front opened onto the pavement, at the back there was usually a small yard. In a few cases there was one yard for 8 houses and 2 houses shared a toilet. There were of course no bathrooms.

There were 18 families who lived in new council houses with a small garden and a bathroom though a few had an outside toilet.

There were 12 families who lived in lodgings generally in very cramped conditions and mainly with relatives.

Occupations of Parents. An electrician and a railway clerk, lorry drivers, coal miners, heavy industrial workers, plumbers, plasterers, painters, shop keepers and mill workers.

There were 16 of the mothers in full time work in mills, shops, factories and offices, while 9 did part time work.

APPENDIX

NURSERY SCHOOL 'D'

(Accommodation 40 children)

There was a waiting list of 126 children. Of these children, 31 were too old to be admitted, while 6 children with their families had left the district. There were 10 mothers who were either consistently out when the interviewer called or had made other arrangements for their children. This left a waiting list of 79 children.

Housing Conditions. This was an area which had been badly damaged by war. Its many open spaces were overgrown with weeds covering the foundations of factories, shops and houses. The conditions under which people lived ranged from the overcrowded slum to the tree lined road of the residential area. There were 52 families who lived in flats, some with their own bathrooms and toilets, others sharing. One family lived in a squatters' hut and 4 families lived in Nissen huts. The remainder lived in family houses sharing bathrooms and toilets.

Occupations of Parents. Professional clerks and teachers, industrial workers, shop keepers, drivers, dock workers, dairy hands, with a postman, policeman, tailor, carpenter, printer, and upholsterer.

There were 5 mothers working full time and 4 working part time, 3 mothers with young children were separated from their husbands.

NURSERY SCHOOL 'E'

(Accommodation 40 children)

There was a waiting list of 80 children; 39 of these children, however, were too old to be admitted, while 5 mothers no longer wished to send their children. This left 34 children waiting for admission.

Housing Conditions. A busy crowded area, along a river front, with barges unloading coal and a railway running through its

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

centre; a dirty treeless spot with a number of bomb sites on which the children played.

The majority of the families lived in small houses or cottages of 2 storeys, 2 rooms up and 2 rooms down, opening directly on the street. There were one or two families living in quite pleasant pre-fabricated houses with small gardens. Outside the centre of the district there was a residential area with tree-lined streets where a few families lived; they reached the Nursery School by bus.

Occupations of the Parents. Army and navy office clerks, factory workers, dockers, busdrivers and draughtsmen.

There were 8 mothers in full-time work in shops and factories, one of these was a widow and one was separated from her husband. There were 4 mothers doing part time work in offices and shops.

NURSERY SCHOOL 'F'

(Accommodation 40 children)

There was a waiting list of 46 children. Of these, 4 families had moved from rooms to new council houses on the other side of the town. This left a waiting list of 42 children. The housing situation in this area had been greatly relieved by a new housing estate on the other side of the town and many families who had been living in rooms had moved there. Unfortunately there was no Nursery School on the estate.

Housing Conditions. There were 26 families living in 3 bedroom council houses with bathroom and inside toilet, 3 families lived in comfortable private houses and 2 families in an older type of council house with an outside toilet.

There were 7 families living in rooms, while 4 lived with their parents.

Occupations of Parents. A teacher, a chef, a tailor, a bus conductor, clerks, factory workers, printers, painters, bricklayers, shop assistants and labourers. One mother was separated from her husband and 4 were working.

APPENDIX

NURSERY SCHOOL 'G'

There was a waiting list of 11 children.

Housing Conditions. Until recently this had been a quiet little village, but latterly the local council had embarked on a big housing programme.

Two families lived in old cottages with no bathrooms and the toilets at the bottom of the garden. Another lived in a caravan. Two families lived in upstairs flats in a converted mansion, they looked very pleasant for adults but were not very suitable for the children. The rest of the families lived in ordinary 3-bedroom type houses with bathrooms and inside toilets.

Occupations of the Parents. A police sergeant, 2 engineers, a company director, a research chemist, an estate agent, a shop manager, a flour mill worker and 2 labourers.

There were no mothers working.

NURSERY SCHOOL 'H'

(Accommodation 90 children)

The waiting list of this Nursery School was very long (215 names) and since it was impossible to visit all the families, a representative group of 50 were selected. Out of these 50, there were 5 mothers who no longer wished to send their children, having made other arrangements, 4 mothers had got their children into Day Nurseries as they were working full time, 4 mothers had moved out of the district, 2 children had gone to School. This left 27 families (32 children).

Housing Conditions. There were 16 families who lived in terrace houses consisting of 2 storeys, and usually without a basement. The only exception to this type of house was a 3 storeyed terrace house that had been built in 1887, and which was in a shocking state through neglect and bomb-damage which had destroyed all but 2 houses in the row. Of these 16, 2 families shared a house of this type with relatives, while another family sub-let rooms to tenants and 4 families rented rooms in these houses. There were 2 families living in pleasant

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

pre-fabricated houses with gardens. Another family lived in a police house as the father was a detective-inspector. Of the 8 families living in flats, 4 lived in new council flats, well-designed and pleasing. There were 4 families living in flats owned by trust companies or private owners. These were dark and dirty and on each landing there were 2 communal toilets for the tenants living on that floor and one washing sink, but no baths.

Occupation of the Parents. A detective-inspector, several clerks, a cabinet-maker, porters, carpenters, drivers and labourers.

There were 11 mothers working, 7 of them did part-time cleaning in offices and one was a part-time waitress. One mother had been deserted by her husband and lived with her mother while doing part-time work.

The Mothers' Reasons for wanting to send their Children

Space to play, although not always the first reason given, was the one mentioned most often.

The great majority of these children had nowhere to play and even if there was a garden, unless the family had the whole house, it was generally neither accessible nor suitable for the children's use.

Several mothers said that there were always complaints about children touching and picking the flowers and it was really not worth while letting them be there.

Those families who lived in old-fashioned flats, especially attic flats, had a great deal to contend with since the neighbours were always complaining of the noise the children made. This tended to make the mothers repress their children's play and keep them as quiet as possible.

Even the large block of modern flats did not provide much space for children's active play and noise was also a real problem. If the block contained a playground the mother on the ground floor might let her young children use it, but mothers living above that could neither see nor hear their children if they were outside. They therefore could not let their young children play alone, and unwatched.

APPENDIX

Those families living in 2 rooms, such as a bedroom and a kitchen, or one room with no garden, had the children always on top of them. The mother particularly found the children's noisy chatter and activity in so confined a space more than she could bear.

Those mothers whose front doors opened directly onto a main road full of heavy traffic were always afraid that their children under 5 would stray into the road, forgetful that the narrow pavement was the boundary for their play.

The majority of the mothers were well aware that their children needed fresh air and space and freedom to move actively.

This meant that they must take their children out to a park or go for a walk. Many mothers had a long walk or bus ride before they found a suitable place for their children to run about freely.

The need for companionship was given as a reason nearly as often as the need for space to play.

There was a large proportion of only children. Many mothers said they could not have another child for physical reasons, or that they could not afford to have another child, or that until they could find better accommodation they were not going to increase their family.

Many of the mothers knew that their children needed companionship and they realised the importance of their learning to mix and play with others and the effect this had on their development as a whole.

Many children, who were not only children, had much older brothers and sisters and so had no one really with whom to share games and toys.

The realisation that at five their children would be plunged suddenly into a large group when they went to school also worried the mothers. Many of the mothers realised that the Nursery School could give their child things which they were unable to provide, and they spoke about the play material they saw the Nursery School children using and the fact that the children all looked so happy.

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Those mothers whose children had feeding difficulties or who were backward in any way felt that these troubles might be cleared up by attendance at the Nursery School. They were very concerned with their children's mental health, though they did not use that term. The less articulate just said that they thought the Nursery School would be 'good' for their children.

Unsatisfactory housing perhaps because it was so obvious was not given as a reason as often as one might have expected, considering the dreadful living conditions of so many of the families. It was, however, continually in the minds of the mothers, who were very concerned about their accommodation. Many of them were trying to find alternative places to live. They had put their names on the waiting lists for council houses or were trying to save money to buy their own houses. Those who had no bathrooms often mentioned it as a real hardship and were distressed at the bad habits their children were forming, because of shared toilets.

The reason that was often given by the mothers was their need to work, and until their child was at the Nursery School they could not get a job. Many of them said how impossible it was to buy out of the husband's earnings clothing and shoes at the present prices, both for themselves and the children. Many mothers wanted to work and save money to put towards the family's summer holiday, others said that, after all their living expenses had been paid, there was very little money left for anything else.

There were some outstanding cases when the ill health of the mothers made it very difficult for them to give their children good, understanding care. Illness made them irritable and impatient; if they had to go to hospital frequently the children often had to be taken too—as there was nothing else to do with them. The mothers realised that it was hard on the children and they felt that the Nursery School would be a real relief to both of them.

There was a great deal of real awareness among the mothers of the needs of their children and they knew that the Nursery School could provide them.

APPENDIX

*Total number of reasons given by parents for wishing
their children admitted to Nursery School*

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C & D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>Total</i>
Space to play	79	30	19	5	7	5	9	154
Companionship	70	33	22	3	10	3	10	151
Mother's need to work	50	28	24	10	9	—	7	128
Unsatisfactory housing	49	4	18	—	6	3	4	84
Child's health	38	4	33	—	3	—	—	78
Mother actually working	23	12	24	3	3	1	3	69
Nursery School routines	15	21	—	—	4	2	8	50
Mother's need of time for domestic activities	15	21	13	—	1	—	—	50
Disturbed or difficult children	19	13	8	2	3	—	4	49
Other relatives at Nursery School	11	3	11	1	10	2	2	40
Parents' ill-health	—	5	17	3	—	—	4	29
Pregnancy of mother	5	3	1	1	6	2	1	19
Child's safety	—	—	16	—	—	3	—	19
Disturbed home	5	—	12	—	1	—	—	18
Preparation for school life	11	3	1	—	1	—	—	16
Recommended by the Doctor or Clinic	10	—	6	—	—	—	—	16
Mother at part time work	—	8	—	—	—	—	8	16
Child at work with mother	2	—	8	—	1	—	—	11
Good preparation for later education	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
Need for quiet in the home owing to father's shift work	—	—	5	—	—	3	—	8
Child's overdependence on mother	3	—	—	—	—	1	2	6
Elder sister missing school to look after the child	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2

EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

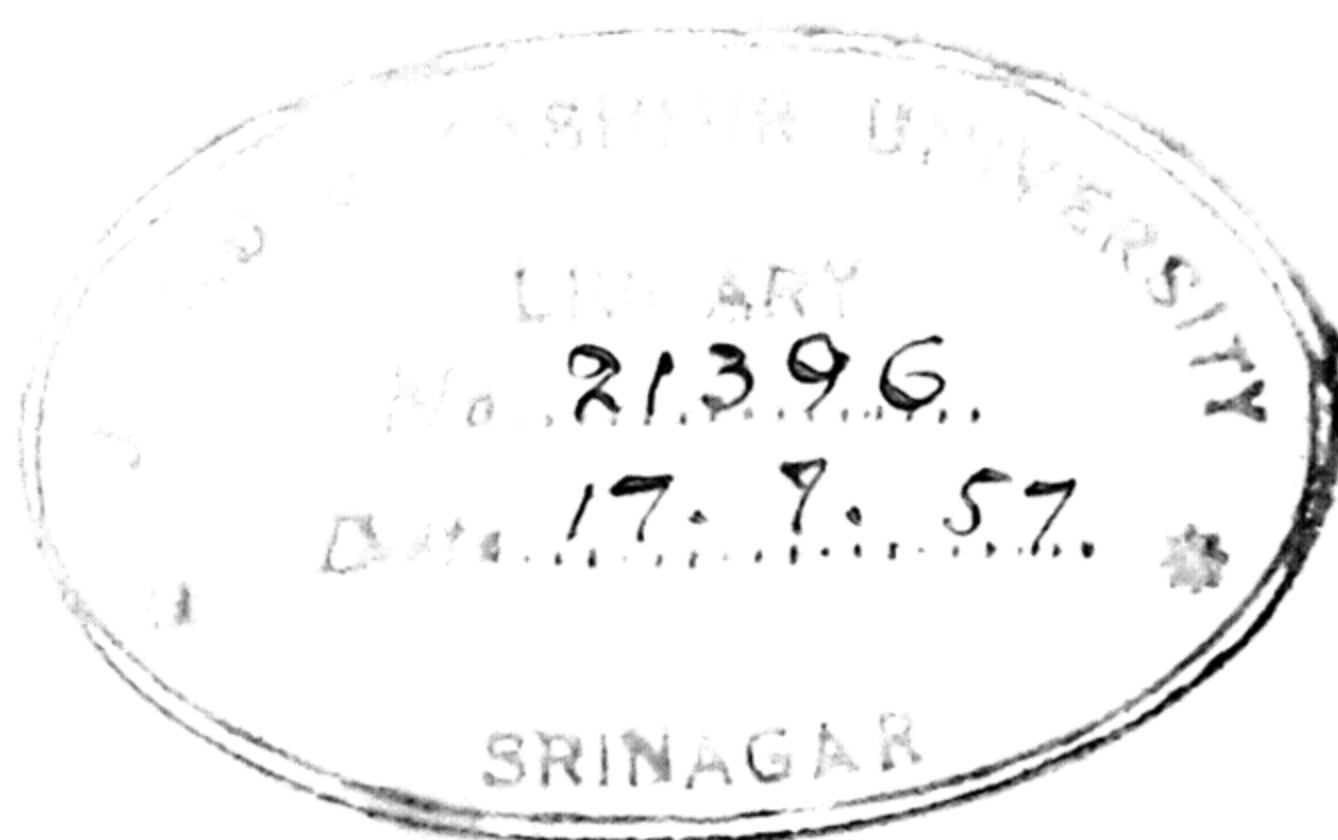
To the majority of them it was a bitter disappointment to have to wait, often with very little hope of getting their child into a Nursery School.

The table on p. 117 shows the variety of reasons given by the mothers for wanting to get their children into Nursery Schools.

The study from which this report is made included also case histories of every home visited and two tables showing (a) the number of children in each family and (b) the order in which mothers gave their reasons for wishing to send children to the Nursery School.

JOAN E. CA

Department of Child Development
University of London Institute of Education
Malet Street
London, W.C.1



ALLAMA IQBAL LIBRARY



21396

